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THE LIFE WORK OF
HENRI RENÉ GUY
DE MAUPASSANT

Embracing
ROMANCE, TRAVEL, COMEDY & VERSE,
For the first time Complete in
English.
With a Critical Preface by
PAUL BOURGET
of the French Academy
and an Introduction by
Robert Arnot, M.A.

ILLUSTRATED FROM ORIGINAL DRAWINGS
BY EMINENT
FRENCH AND AMERICAN ARTISTS.

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The Works of Guy de Maupassant

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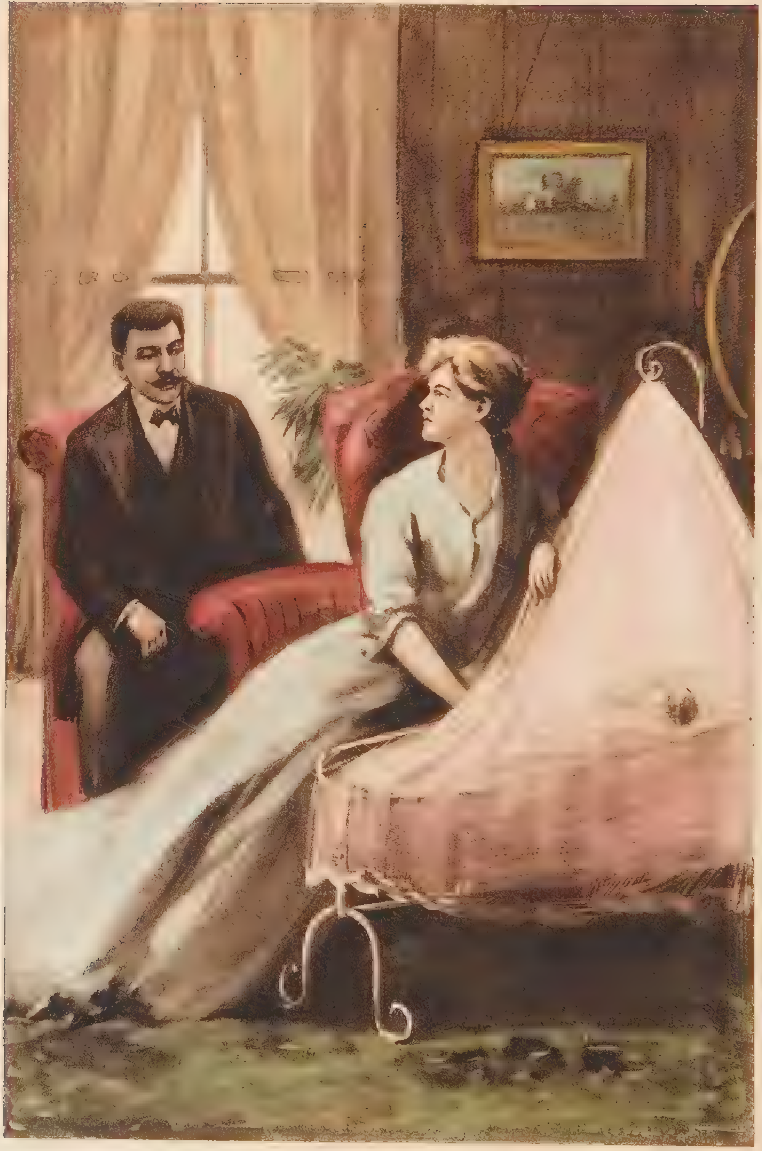

AFTER THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY FERDINAND BAC.

"*He had thought with deep anxiety of this child, of which he was the father.*"

(See page 343)

MONT ORIOL

OR

A ROMANCE OF AUVERGNE

A NOVEL

BY

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

VOL. VIII

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MONT ORIOL

CHAPTER I.

The Spa

The first bathers, the early risers, who had already been at the water, were walking slowly, in pairs or alone, under the huge trees along the stream which rushes down the gorges of Enval.

Others arrived from the village, and entered the establishment in a hurried fashion. It was a spacious building, the ground floor being reserved for thermal treatment, while the first story served as a casino, *café,* and billiard-room. Since Doctor Bonnefille had discovered in the heart of Enval the great spring, baptized by him the Bonnefille Spring, some proprietors of the country and the surrounding neighborhood, timid speculators, had decided to erect in the midst of this superb glen of Auvergne, savage and gay withal, planted with walnut and giant chestnut trees, a vast house for every kind of use, serving equally for the purpose of cure and of pleasure, in which mineral waters, douches, and baths were sold below, and beer, liqueurs, and music above.

A portion of the ravine along the stream had been inclosed, to constitute the park indispensable to every spa; and three walks had been made, one nearly straight, and the other two zigzag. At the end of the first gushed out an artificial spring detached from the parent spring, and bubbling into a great basin of cement, sheltered by a straw roof, under the care of an impassive woman, whom everyone called "Marie" in a familiar sort of way. This calm Auvergnat, who wore a little cap always as white as snow, and a big apron, perfectly clean at all times, which concealed her working-dress, rose up slowly as soon as she saw a bather coming along the road in her direction.

The bather would smile with a melancholy air, drink the water, and return her the glass, saying, "Thanks, Marie." Then he would turn on his heel and walk away. And Marie sat down again on her straw chair to wait for the next comer.

They were not, however, very numerous. The Enval station had just been six years open for invalids, and scarcely could count more patients at the end of these six years than it had at the start. About fifty had come there, attracted more than anything else by the beauty of the district, by the charm of this little village lost under enormous trees, whose twisted trunks seemed as big as the houses, and by the reputation of the gorges at the end of this strange glen which opened on the great plain of Auvergne and ended abruptly at the foot of the high mountain bristling with craters of unknown age—a savage and magnificent crevasse, full of rocks fallen or threatening, from which rushed a stream that cascaded over giant stones, forming a little lake in front of each.

This thermal station had been brought to birth as they all are, with a pamphlet on the spring by Doctor Bonnefille. He opened with a eulogistic description, in a majestic and sentimental style, of the Alpine seductions of the neighborhood. He selected only adjectives which convey a vague sense of delightfulness and enjoyment — those which produce effect without committing the writer to any material statement. All the surroundings were picturesque, filled with splendid sites or landscapes whose graceful outlines aroused soft emotions. All the promenades in the vicinity possessed a remarkable originality, such as would strike the imagination of artists and tourists. Then abruptly, without any transition, he plunged into the therapeutic qualities of the Bonnefille Spring, bicarbonate, sodium, mixed, lithineous, ferruginous, *et cetera, et cetera,* capable of curing every disease. He had, moreover, enumerated them under this heading: Chronic affections or acute specially associated with Enval. And the list of affections associated with Enval was long — long and varied, consoling for invalids of every kind. The pamphlet concluded with some information of practical utility, the cost of lodgings, commodities, and hotels — for three hotels had sprung up simultaneously with the casino-medical establishment. These were the Hotel Splendid, quite new, built on the slope of the glen looking down on the baths; the Thermal Hotel, an old inn with a new coat of plaster; and the Hotel Vidaillet, formed very simply by the purchase of three adjoining houses, which had been altered so as to convert them into one.

Then, all at once, two new doctors had installed themselves in the locality one morning, without anyone well knowing how they came, for at spas doctors seem to dart up out of the springs, like gas-jets. These were Doctor Honorat, a native of Auvergne, and Doctor Latonne, of Paris. A fierce antagonism soon burst out between Doctor Latonne and Doctor Bonnefille, while Doctor Honorat, a big, clean-shaven man, smiling and pliant, stretched forth his right hand to the first, and his left hand to the second, and remained on good terms with both. But Doctor Bonnefille was master of the situation, with his title of Inspector of the Waters and of the thermal establishment of Enval-les-Bains.

This title was his strength and the establishment his chattel. There he spent his days, and even his nights, it was said. A hundred times, in the morning, he would go from his house which was quite near in the village to his consultation-study fixed at the right-hand side facing the entrance to the thermal baths. Lying in wait there, like a spider in his web, he watched the comings and goings of the invalids, inspecting his own patients with a severe eye and those of the other doctors with a look of fury. He questioned everybody almost in the style of a ship's captain, and he struck terror into newcomers, unless it happened that he made them smile.

This day, as he arrived with rapid steps, which made the big flaps of his old frock coat fly up like a pair of wings, he was stopped suddenly by a voice exclaiming: "Doctor!"

He turned round. His thin face, full of big ugly wrinkles, and looking quite black at the end with a grizzled beard rarely cut, made an effort to smile; and he took off the tall silk hat, shabby, stained, and greasy, that covered his thick pepper-and-salt head of hair—"pepper and soiled," as his rival, Doctor Latonne, put it. Then he advanced a step, made a bow, and murmured:

"Good morning, Marquis—are you quite well this morning?"

The Marquis de Ravenel, a little man well preserved, stretched out his hand to the doctor, as he replied:

"Very well, doctor, very well, or, at least, not ill. I am always suffering from my kidneys; but indeed I am better, much better; and I am as yet only at my tenth bath. Last year I did not obtain the effect until the sixteenth, you recollect?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"But it is not about this I want to talk to you. My daughter has arrived this morning, and I wish to have a chat with you about her case first of all, because my son-in-law, William Andermatt, the banker—"

"Yes, I know."

"My son-in-law has a letter of recommendation addressed to Doctor Latonne. As for me, I have no confidence except in you, and I beg of you to have the kindness to come up to the hotel before—you understand? I prefer to say things to you candidly. Are you free at the present moment?"

Doctor Bonnefille had put on his hat again, and looked excited and troubled. He answered at once:

"Yes, I shall be free immediately. Do you wish me to accompany you?"

"Why, certainly."

And, turning their backs on the establishment, they directed their steps up a circular walk leading to the door of the Hotel Splendid, built on the slope of the mountain so as to offer a view of it to travelers.

They made their way to the drawing-room in the first story adjoining the apartments occupied by the Ravenel and Andermatt families, and the Marquis left the doctor by himself while he went to look for his daughter.

He came back with her presently. She was a fair young woman, small, pale, very pretty, whose features seemed like those of a child, while her blue eyes, boldly fixed, cast on people a resolute look that gave an alluring impression of firmness and a peculiar charm to this refined and fascinating creature. There was not much the matter with her—vague languors, sadnesses, bursts of tears without apparent cause, angry fits for which there seemed no season, and lastly anæmia. She craved above all for a child, which had been vainly looked forward to since her marriage, more than two years before.

Doctor Bonnefille declared that the waters of Enval would be effectual, and proceeded forthwith to write a prescription. The doctor's prescriptions had always the formidable aspect of an indictment. On a big white sheet of paper such as schoolboys use, his directions exhibited themselves in numerous paragraphs of two or three lines each, in an irregular handwriting, bristling with letters resembling spikes. And the potions, the pills, the powders, which were to be taken fasting in the morning, at midday, and in the evening, followed in ferocious-looking characters.

One of these prescriptions might read:

> "Inasmuch as M. X. is affected with a chronic malady, incurable and mortal, he will take, first, sulphate of quinine, which will render him deaf, and will make him lose his memory; secondly, bromide of potassium, which will destroy his stomach, weaken all his faculties, cover him with pimples, and make his breath foul; thirdly, salicylate of soda, whose curative effects have not yet been proved, but which seems to lead to a terrible and speedy death the patient treated by this remedy. And concurrently, chloral, which causes insanity, and belladonna, which attacks the eyes; all vegetable solutions and all mineral compositions which corrupt the blood, corrode the organs, consume the bones, and destroy by medicine those whom disease has spared."

For a long time he went on writing on the front page and on the back, then signed it just as a judge might have signed a death-sentence.

The young woman, seated opposite to him, stared at him with an inclination to laugh that made the corners of her lips rise up.

When, with a low bow, he had taken himself off, she snatched up the paper blackened with ink, rolled it up into a ball, and flung it into the fire. Then, breaking into a hearty laugh, said:

"Oh! father, where did you discover this fossil? Why, he looks for all the world like an old-clothesman. Oh! how clever of you to dig up a physician that might have lived before the Revolution! Oh! how funny he is, aye, and dirty—ah, yes! dirty—I believe really he has stained my penholder."

The door opened, and M. Andermatt's voice was heard saying, "Come in, doctor."

And Doctor Latonne appeared. Erect, slender, circumspect, comparatively young, attired in a fashionable morning-coat, and holding in his hand the high silk hat which distinguishes the practicing doctor in the greater part of the thermal stations of Auvergne, the physician from Paris, without beard or mustache, resembled an actor who had retired into the country.

The Marquis, confounded, did not know what to say or do, while his daughter put her handkerchief to her mouth to keep herself from bursting out laughing in the newcomer's face. He bowed with an air of self-confidence, and at a sign from the young woman took a seat.

M. Andermatt, who followed him, minutely detailed for him his wife's condition, her illnesses, together with their accompanying symptoms, the opinions of the physicians consulted in Paris, and then his own opinion based on special grounds which he explained in technical language.

He was a man still quite youthful, a Jew, who devoted himself to financial transactions. He entered into all sorts of speculations, and displayed in all matters of business a subtlety of intellect, a rapidity of penetration, and a soundness of judgment that were perfectly marvelous. A little too stout already for his figure, which was not tall, chubby, bald, with an infantile expression, fat hands, and short thighs, he looked much too greasy to be quite healthy, and spoke with amazing facility.

By means of tact he had been able to form an alliance with the daughter of the Marquis de Ravenel with a view to extending his speculations into a sphere to which he did not belong. The Marquis, besides, possessed an income of about thirty thousand francs, and had only two children; but, when M. Andermatt married, though scarcely thirty years of age, he owned already five or six millions, and had sown enough to bring him in a harvest of ten or twelve. M. de Ravenel, a man of weak, irresolute, shifting, and undecided character, at first angrily repulsed the overtures made to him with respect to this union, and was indignant at the thought of seeing his daughter allied to an Israelite. Then, after six months' resistance, he gave way, under the pressure of accumulated wealth, on the condition that the children should be brought up in the Catholic religion.

But they waited for a long time and no offspring was yet announced. It was then that the Marquis, enchanted for the past two years with the waters of Enval, recalled to mind the fact that Doctor Bonnefille's pamphlet also promised the cure for sterility.

Accordingly, he sent for his daughter, whom his son-in-law accompanied, in order to install her and to intrust her, acting on the advice of his Paris physician, to the care of Doctor Latonne. Therefore, Andermatt, since his arrival, had gone to look for this practitioner, and went on enumerating the symptoms which presented themselves in his wife's case. He finished by mentioning how much he had been pained at finding his hopes of paternity unrealized.

Doctor Latonne allowed him to go on to the end; then, turning toward the young woman: "Have you anything to add, Madame?"

She replied gravely: "No, Monsieur, nothing at all."

He went on: "In that case, I will trouble you to take off your traveling-dress and your corset, and to put on a simple white dressing-gown, all white."

She was astonished; he rapidly explained his system: "Good heavens, Madame, it is very simple. Formerly, the belief was that all diseases came from a poison in the blood or from an organic cause; to-day, we simply assume that, in many cases, and, above all, in your particular case, the uncertain ailments from which you suffer, and even certain serious troubles, very serious, mortal, may proceed only from the fact that some organ or other, having taken, under influences easy to determine, an abnormal development, to the detriment of the neighboring organs, destroys all the harmony, all the equilibrium of the human body, modifies or arrests its functions, and obstructs the play of all the other organs. A swelling of the stomach may be sufficient to make us believe in a disease of the heart, which, impeded in its movements, becomes violent, irregular, sometimes even intermittent. The dilatation of the liver or of certain glands may cause ravages which unobservant physicians attribute to a thousand different causes. Therefore, the first thing that we should do is to ascertain whether all the organs of a patient have their true compass and their normal position, for a very little thing is enough to upset a person's health. I am going, then, Madame, if you will allow me, to examine you with great care, and to mark out on your dressing-gown the limits, the dimensions, and the positions of your organs."

He had put down his hat on a chair, and he spoke in a facile manner. His large mouth, in opening and closing, made two deep hollows in his shaven cheeks, which gave him a certain ecclesiastical air.

Andermatt, delighted, exclaimed: "Capital, capital! That is very clever, very ingenious, very new, very modern."

"Very modern" in his mouth was the height of admiration.

The young woman, highly amused, rose and passed into her own apartment. She came back, after the lapse of a few minutes, in a white dressing-gown.

The physician made her lie down on a sofa, then, drawing from his pocket a pencil with three points, a black, a red, and a blue, he commenced to auscultate and to tap his new patient, riddling the dressing-gown all over with little dots of color by way of noting each observation.

She resembled, after a quarter of an hour of this work, a map indicating continents, seas, capes, rivers, kingdoms, and cities, and bearing the names of all these terrestrial divisions, for the doctor wrote on every line of demarcation two or three Latin words intelligible to himself alone.

Now, when he had listened to all the internal sounds in Madame Andermatt's body, and tapped on all the parts of her person that were irritated or hollow-sounding, he drew forth from his pocket a notebook of red leather with gold threads to fasten it, divided in alphabetical order, consulted the index, opened it, and wrote: "Observation 6347.—Madame A——, 21 years."

Then, collecting from her head to her feet the colored notes on her dressing-gown, and reading them as an Egyptologist deciphers hieroglyphics, he entered them in the notebook.

He observed, when he had finished: "Nothing disquieting, nothing abnormal, save a slight, a very slight deviation, which some thirty acidulated baths will cure. You will take furthermore three half-glasses of water each morning before noon. Nothing else. I will come back to see you in four or five days." Then he rose, bowed, and went out with such promptitude that everyone remained stupefied at it. This abrupt style of departure was a part of his mannerism, his tact, his special stamp. He considered it very good form, and thought it made a great impression on the patient.

Madame Andermatt ran to look at herself in the glass and shaking all over with a joyous burst of childlike laughter, said:

"Oh! how amusing they are, how droll they are! Tell me, is there not one more left of them? I want to see him immediately! Will, go and find him for me! We must have the third one here—I want to see him."

Her husband, surprised, asked:

"How, a third, a third what?"

The Marquis deemed it advisable to explain, while offering excuses, for he was a little afraid of his son-in-law. He related, therefore, how Doctor Bonnefille had come to see himself, and how he had introduced him to Christiane, in order to ascertain his opinion, as he had great confidence in the experience of the old physician, who was a native of the district, and who had discovered the spring.

Andermatt shrugged his shoulders, and declared that Doctor Latonne alone would take care of his wife, so that the Marquis, very uneasy, began to reflect on the best course to take in order to arrange matters without offending his irascible physician.

Christiane asked: "Is Gontran here?" This was her brother.

Her father replied: "Yes, for the past four days, with a friend of his of whom he has often spoken, M. Paul Bretigny. They are making a tour together in Auvergne. They have come from Mont Doré and from Bourboule, and will be setting out for Cantal at the end of next week."

Then he asked the young woman whether she desired to rest till luncheon after the night in the train; but she had slept perfectly in the sleeping car, and only required an hour for her toilette, after which she wished to visit the village and the establishment.

Her father and her husband went back to their rooms to wait till she was ready. She soon came out to call them, and they descended together. She grew enthusiastic at first sight over the aspect of the village, built in the middle of a wood in a deep valley, which seemed hemmed in on every side by chestnut-trees lofty as mountains. These could be seen everywhere, springing up just as they chanced to have shot forth here and there in a century, in front of doorways, in the courtyards, in the streets. Then, again, there were fountains everywhere made of a great black stone standing upright pierced with a small aperture, through which dashed a streamlet of clear water that whirled about in a circle before it fell into the trough. A fresh odor of grass and of stables floated over those masses of verdure; and they saw the peasant women of Auvergne standing in front of their dwellings, spinning at their distaffs with lively movements of their fingers the black wool attached to their girdles. Their short petticoats showed their thin ankles covered with blue stockings, and the bodies of their dresses fastened over their shoulders with straps left exposed the linen sleeves of their chemises, out of which stretched their hard, dry arms and bony hands.

But, suddenly, a queer lilting kind of music burst on the promenaders' ears. It was like a barrel-organ with piping sounds, a barrel-organ used up, broken-winded, invalided.

Christiane exclaimed: "What is that?"

Her father began to laugh: "It is the orchestra of the Casino. It takes four of them to make that noise."

And he led her up to a red bill affixed to a corner of a farmhouse, on which appeared in black letters:

CASINO OF ENVAL.

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF M. PETRUS MARTEL,
OF THE ODÉON.

Saturday, 6th of July.

Grand Concert

organized by the *Maestro*, Saint Landri, second grand prize winner at the Conservatoire.

The piano will be presided over by M. Javel, grand laureate of the Conservatoire.

Flute, M. Noirot, laureate of the Conservatoire.

Double-bass, M. Nicordi, laureate of the Royal Academy of Brussels.

After the Concert, grand representation of

Lost in the Forest,

a Comedy in one act, by M. Pointellet.

Characters:

Pierre de Lapointe	M. Petrus Martel, of the Odéon.
Oscar Léveillé	M. Petitnivelle, of the Vaudeville.
Jean	M. Lapalme, of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux.
Philippine	Mademoiselle Odelin, of the Odéon.

During the representation, the Orchestra will be likewise conducted by the *Maestro*, Saint Landri.

Christiane read this aloud, laughed, and was astonished.

Her father went on: "Oh! they will amuse you. Come and look at them."

They turned to the right, and entered the park. The bathers promenaded gravely, slowly, along the three walks. They drank their glasses of water, and then went away. Some of them, seated on benches, traced lines in the sand with the ends of their walking-sticks or their umbrellas. They did not talk, seemed not to think, scarcely to live, enervated, paralyzed by the *ennui* of the thermal station. Only the odd music of the orchestra broke the sweet silence as it leaped into the air, coming one knew not whence, produced one knew not how, passing under the foliage and appearing to stir up these melancholy walkers.

A voice cried: "Christiane!"

She turned round. It was her brother. He rushed toward her, embraced her, and, having pressed Andermatt's hand, took his sister by the arm, and drew her along with him, leaving his father and his brother-in-law in the rear.

They chatted. He was a tall, well-made young fellow, prone to laughter like her, light-hearted as the Marquis, indifferent to events, but always on the lookout for a thousand francs.

"I thought you were asleep," said he. "But for that I would have come to embrace you. And then Paul carried me off this morning to the château of Tournoel."

"Who is Paul? Oh, yes, your friend!"

"Paul Bretigny. It is true you don't know him. He is taking a bath at the present moment."

"He is a patient, then?"

"No, but he is curing himself, all the same. He is trying to get over a love episode."

"And so he's taking acidulated baths—they're called acidulated, are they not?—in order to restore himself."

"Yes. He's doing all I told him to do. Oh! he has been hit hard. He's a violent youth, terrible, and has been at death's door. He wanted to kill himself, too. It was an actress—a well-known actress. He was madly in love with her. And then she was not faithful to him, do you see? The result was a frightful drama. So I brought him away. He's going on better now, but he's still thinking about it."

She smiled for a moment, then, becoming grave, she returned:

"It will amuse me to see him."

For her, however, this thing, "Love," did not mean very much. She sometimes bestowed a thought on it, just as you think, when you are poor, now and then of a pearl necklace, of a diadem of brilliants, with a desire awakened in you for this thing—possible though far away. This fancy would come to her after reading some novel to kill time, without attaching to it, beyond that, any special importance. She had never dreamed about it much, having been born with a happy soul, tranquil and contented, and, although now two years and a half married, she had not yet awakened out of that sleep in which innocent young girls live, that sleep of the heart, of the mind, and of the senses, which, with some women, lasts until death. For her life was simple and good, without complications. She had never looked for the causes or the hidden meaning of things. She had lived on from day to day, slept soundly, dressed with taste, laughed, and felt satisfied. What more could she have asked for?

When Andermatt had been introduced to her as her future husband, she refused to wed him at first with a childish indignation at the idea of becoming the wife of a Jew. Her father and her brother, sharing her repugnance, replied with her and like her by formally declining the offer. Andermatt disappeared, acted as if he were dead, but, at the end of three months, had lent Gontran more than twenty thousand francs; and the Marquis, for other reasons, was beginning to change his opinion.

In the first place, he always on principle yielded when one persisted, through sheer egotistical desire not to be disturbed. His daughter used to say of him: "All papa's ideas are jumbled up together"; and this was true. Without opinions, without beliefs, he had only enthusiasms, which varied every moment. At one time, he would attach himself, with a transitory and poetic exaltation, to the old traditions of his race, and would long for a king, but an intellectual king, liberal, enlightened, marching along with the age. At another time, after he had read a book by Michelet or some democratic thinker, he would become a passionate advocate of human equality, of modern ideas, of the claims of the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering. He believed in everything, just as each thing harmonized with his passing moods; and, when his old friend, Madame Icardon, who, connected as she was with many Israelites, desired the marriage of Christiane and Andermatt, and began to preach in favor of it, she knew full well the kind of arguments with which she should attack him.

She pointed out to him that the Jewish race had arrived at the hour of vengeance. It had been a race crushed down as the French people had been before the Revolution, and was now going to oppress others by the power of gold. The Marquis, devoid of religious faith, but convinced that the idea of God was rather a legislative idea, which had more effect in keeping the foolish, the ignorant, and the timid in the right path than the simple notion of Justice, regarded dogmas with a respectful indifference, and held in equal and sincere esteem Confucius, Mohammed, and Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the fact that the latter was crucified did not at all present itself as an original wrongdoing but as a gross, political blunder. In consequence it only required a few weeks to make him admire the toil, hidden, incessant, and all-powerful, of the persecuted Jews everywhere. And, viewing with different eyes their brilliant triumph, he looked upon it as a just reparation for the indignities that so long had been heaped upon them. He saw them masters of kings, who are the masters of the people—sustaining thrones or allowing them to collapse, able to make a nation bankrupt as one might a wine-merchant, proud in the presence of princes who had grown humble, and casting their impure gold into the half-open purses of the most Catholic sovereigns, who thanked them by conferring on them titles of nobility and lines of railway. So he consented to the marriage of William Andermatt with Christiane de Ravenel.

As for Christiane, under the unconscious pressure of Madame Icardon, her mother's old companion, who had become her intimate adviser since the Marquise's death, a pressure to which was added that of her father and the interested indifference of her brother, she consented to marry this big, overrich youth, who was not ugly but scarcely pleased her, just as she would have consented to spend a summer in a disagreeable country.

She found him a good fellow, kind, not stupid, nice in intimate relations; but she frequently laughed at him along with Gontran, whose gratitude was of the perfidious order.

He would say to her: "Your husband is rosier and balder than ever. He looks like a sickly flower, or a sucking pig with its hair shaved off. Where does he get these colors?"

She would reply: "I assure you I have nothing to do with it. There are days when I feel inclined to paste him on a box of sugar-plums."

But they had arrived in front of the baths. Two men were seated on straw chairs with their backs to the wall, smoking their pipes, one at each side of the door.

Said Gontran: "Look, here are two good types. Watch the fellow at the right, the hunchback with the Greek cap! That's Père Printemps, an ex-jailer from Riom, who has become the guardian, almost the manager, of the Enval establishment. For him nothing is changed, and he governs the invalids just as he did his prisoners in former days. The bathers are always prisoners, their bathing-boxes are cells, the douche-room a black-hole, and the place where Doctor Bonnefille practices his stomach-washings with the aid of the Baraduc sounding-line a chamber of mysterious torture. He does not salute any of the men on the strength of the principle that all convicts are contemptible beings. He treats women with much more consideration, upon my honor—a consideration mingled with astonishment, for he had none of them under his control in the prison of Riom. That retreat being destined for males only, he has not yet got accustomed to talking to members of the fair sex. The other fellow is the cashier. I defy you to make him write your name. You are just going to see."

And Gontran, addressing the man at the left, slowly said:

"Monsieur Seminois, this is my sister, Madame Andermatt, who wants to subscribe for a dozen baths."

The cashier, very tall, very thin, with a poor appearance, rose up, went into his office, which exactly faced the study of the medical inspector, opened his book, and asked:

"What name?"

"Andermatt."

"What did you say?"

"Andermatt."

"How do you spell it?"

"A-n-d-e-r-m-a-t-t."

"All right."

And he slowly wrote it down. When he had finished, Gontran asked:

"Would you kindly read over my sister's name?"

"Yes, Monsieur! Madame Anterpat."

Christiane laughed till the tears came into her eyes, paid for her tickets, and then asked:

"What is it that one hears up there?"

Gontran took her arm in his. Two angry voices reached their ears on the stairs. They went up, opened a door, and saw a large coffee-room with a billiard table in the center. Two men in their shirt-sleeves at opposite sides of the billiard-table, each with a cue in his hand, were furiously abusing one another.

"Eighteen!"

"Seventeen!"

"I tell you I'm eighteen."

"That's not true—you're only seventeen!"

It was the director of the Casino, M. Petrus Martel of the Odéon, who was playing his ordinary game with the comedian of his company, M. Lapalme of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux.

Petrus Martel, whose stomach, stout and inactive, swayed underneath his shirt above a pair of pantaloons fastened anyhow, after having been a strolling player in various places, had undertaken the directorship of the Casino of Enval, and spent his days in drinking the allowances intended for the bathers. He wore an immense mustache like a dragoon, which was steeped from morning till night in the froth of bocks and the sticky syrup of liqueurs, and he had aroused in the old comedian whom he had enlisted in his service an immoderate passion for billiards.

As soon as they got up in the morning, they proceeded to play a game, insulted and threatened one another, expunged the record, began over again, scarcely gave themselves time for breakfast, and could not tolerate two clients coming to drive them away from their green cloth.

They soon put everyone to flight, and did not find this sort of existence unpleasant, though Petrus Martel always found himself at the end of the season in a bankrupt condition.

The female attendant, overwhelmed, would have to look on all day at this endless game, listen to the interminable discussion, and carry from morning till night glasses of beer or half-glasses of brandy to the two indefatigable players.

But Gontran carried off his sister: "Come into the park. 'Tis fresher."

At the end of the establishment they suddenly perceived the orchestra under a Chinese *kiosque.* A fair-haired young man, frantically playing the violin, was conducting with movements of his head. His hair was shaking from one side to the other in the effort to keep time, and his entire torso bent forward and rose up again, swaying from left to right, like the stick of the leader of an orchestra. Facing him sat three strange-looking musicians. This was the *maestro,* Saint Landri.

He and his assistants—a pianist, whose instrument, mounted on rollers, was wheeled each morning from the vestibule of the baths to the *kiosque*; an enormous flautist, who presented the appearance of sucking a match while tickling it with his big swollen fingers, and a double-bass of consumptive aspect—produced with much fatigue this perfect imitation of a bad barrel-organ, which had astonished Christiane in the village street.

As she stopped to look at them, a gentleman saluted her brother.

"Good day, my dear Count."

"Good day, doctor."

And Gontran introduced them: "My sister—Doctor Honorat."

She could scarcely restrain her merriment at the sight of this third physician. The latter bowed and made some complimentary remark.

"I hope that Madame is not an invalid?"

"Yes—slightly."

He did not go farther with the matter, and changed the subject.

"You are aware, my dear Count, that you will shortly have one of the most interesting spectacles that could await you on your arrival in this district."

"What is it, pray, doctor?"

"Père Oriol is going to blast his hill. This is of no consequence to you, but for us it is a big event."

And he proceeded to explain. "Père Oriol—the richest peasant in this part of the country—he is known to be worth over fifty thousand francs a year—owns all the vineyards along the plain up to the outlet of Enval. Now, just as you go out from the village at the division of the valley, rises a little mountain, or rather a high knoll, and on this knoll are the best vineyards of Père Oriol. In the midst of two of them, facing the road, at two paces from the stream, stands a gigantic stone, an elevation which has impeded the cultivation and put into the shade one entire side of the field, on which it looks down. For six years, Père Oriol has every week been announcing that he was going to blast his hill; but he has never made up his mind about it.

"Every time a country boy went to be a soldier, the old man would say to him: 'When you're coming home on furlough, bring me some powder for this rock of mine.' And all the young soldiers would bring back in their knapsacks some powder that they stole for Père Oriol's rock. He has a chest full of this powder, and yet the hill has not been blasted. At last, for a week past, he has been noticed scooping out the stone, with his son, big Jacques, surnamed Colosse, which in Auvergne is pronounced 'Coloche.' This very morning they filled with powder the empty belly of the enormous rock; then they stopped up the mouth of it, only letting in the fuse bought at the tobacconist's. In two hours' time they will set fire to it. Then, five or ten minutes afterward, it will go off, for the end of the fuse is pretty long."

Christiane was interested in this narrative, amused already at the idea of this explosion, finding here again a childish sport that pleased her simple heart. They had now reached the end of the park.

"Where do you go now?" she said.

Doctor Honorat replied: "To the End of the World, Madame; that is to say, into a gorge that has no outlet and which is celebrated in Auvergne. It is one of the loveliest natural curiosities in the district."

But a bell rang behind them. Gontran cried:

"Look here! breakfast-time already!"

They turned back. A tall, young man came up to meet them.

Gontran said: "My dear Christiane, let me introduce to you M. Paul Bretigny." Then, to his friend: "This is my sister, my dear boy."

She thought him ugly. He had black hair, close-cropped and straight, big, round eyes, with an expression that was almost hard, a head also quite

AFTER THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY FERDINAND BAC.

"Let me introduce to you M. Paul Bretigny."

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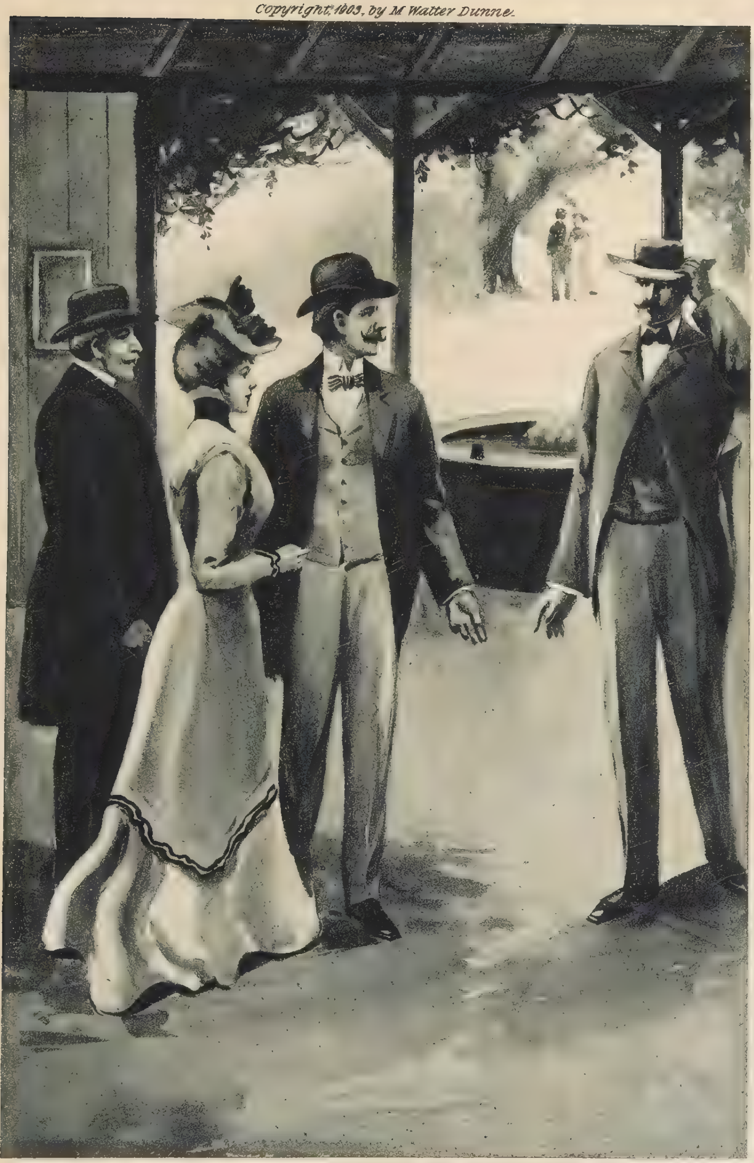

round, very strong, one of those heads that make you think of cannon-balls, herculean shoulders, a rather savage expression, heavy and brutish. But from his jacket, from his linen, from his skin perhaps, came a very subtle perfume, with which the young woman was not familiar, and she asked herself:

"I wonder what odor that is?"

He said to her: "You arrived this morning, Madame?" His voice was a little hollow.

She replied: "Yes, Monsieur."

But Gontran saw the Marquis and Andermatt making signals to them to come in quickly to breakfast.

Doctor Honorat took leave of them, asking as he left whether they really meant to go and see the hill blasted. Christiane declared that she would go; and, leaning on her brother's arm, she murmured as she dragged him along toward the hotel:

"I am as hungry as a wolf. I shall be very much ashamed to eat as much as I feel inclined before your friend."

CHAPTER II.

THE DISCOVERY

The breakfast was long, as the meals usually are at a *table d'hôte*. Christiane, who was not familiar with all the faces of those present, chatted with her father and her brother. Then she went up to her room to take a rest till the time for blasting the rock.

She was ready long before the hour fixed, and made the others start along with her so that they might not miss the explosion. Just outside the village, at the opening of the glen, stood, as they had heard, a high knoll, almost a mountain, which they proceeded to climb under a burning sun, following a little path through the vine-trees. When they reached the summit the young woman uttered a cry of astonishment at the sight of the immense horizon displayed before her eyes. In front of her stretched a limitless plain, which immediately gave her soul the sensation of an ocean. This plain, overhung by a veil of light blue vapor, extended as far as the most distant mountain-ridges, which were scarcely perceptible, some fifty or sixty kilometers away. And under the transparent haze of delicate fineness, which floated above this vast stretch, could be distinguished towns, villages, woods, vast yellow squares of ripe crops, vast green squares of herbage, factories with long, red chimneys and blackened steeples and sharp-pointed structures, with the solidified lava of dead volcanoes.

"Turn around," said her brother.

She turned around. And behind she saw the mountain, the huge mountain indented with craters. This was the entrance to the foundation on which Enval stood, a great expanse of greenness in which one could scarcely trace the hidden gash of the gorge. The trees in a waving mass scaled the high slope as far as the first crater and shut out the view of those beyond. But, as they were exactly on the line that separated the plains from the mountain, the latter stretched to the left toward Clermont-Ferrand, and, wandering away, unrolled over the blue sky their strange mutilated tops, like monstrous blotches—extinct volcanoes, dead volcanoes. And yonder—over yonder, between two peaks—could be seen another, higher still, more distant still, round and majestic, and bearing on its highest pinnacle something of fantastic shape resembling a ruin. This was the Puy de Dome, the king of the mountains of Auvergne, strong and unwieldy, wearing on its head, like a crown placed thereon by the mightiest of peoples, the remains of a Roman temple.

Christiane exclaimed: "Oh! how happy I shall be here!"

And she felt herself happy already, penetrated by that sense of well-being which takes possession of the flesh and the heart, makes you breathe with ease, and renders you sprightly and active when you find yourself in a spot which enchants your eyes, charms and cheers you, seems to have been awaiting you, a spot for which you feel that you were born.

Some one called out to her: "Madame, Madame!" And, at some distance away, she saw Doctor Honorat, recognizable by his big hat. He rushed across to them, and conducted the family toward the opposite side of the hill, over a grassy slope beside a grove of young trees, where already some thirty persons were waiting, strangers and peasants mingled together.

Beneath their feet, the steep hillside descended toward the Riom road, overshadowed by willows that sheltered the shallow river; and in the midst of a vineyard at the edge of this stream rose a sharp-pointed rock before which two men on bended knees seemed to be praying. This was the scene of action.

The Oriols, father and son, were attaching the fuse. On the road, a crowd of curious spectators had stationed themselves, with a line of people lower down in front, among whom village brats were scampering about.

Doctor Honorat chose a convenient place for Christiane to sit down, and there she waited with a beating heart, as if she were going to see the entire population blown up along with the rock.

The Marquis, Andermatt, and Paul Bretigny lay down on the grass at the young woman's side, while Gontran remained standing. He said, in a bantering tone:

"My dear doctor, you must be much less busy than your brother-practitioners, who apparently have not an hour to spare to attend this little *fête?*"

Honorat replied in a good-humored tone:

"I am not less busy; only my patients occupy less of my time. And again I prefer to amuse my patients rather than to physic them."

He had a quiet manner which greatly pleased Gontran. Other persons now arrived, fellow-guests at the *table d'hôte*—the ladies Paille, two widows, mother and daughter; the Monecus, father and daughter; and a very small, fat, man, who was puffing like a boiler that had burst, M. Aubry-Pasteur, an ex-engineer of mines, who had made a fortune in Russia.

M. Pasteur and the Marquis were on intimate terms. He seated himself with much difficulty after some preparatory movements, circumspect and cautious, which considerably amused Christiane. Gontran sauntered away from them, in order to have a look at the other persons whom curiosity had attracted toward the knoll.

Paul Bretigny pointed out to Christiane Andermatt the views, of which they could catch glimpses in the distance. First of all, Riom made a red patch with its row of tiles along the plain; then Ennezat, Maringues, Lezoux, a heap of villages scarcely distinguishable, which only broke the wide expanse of verdure with a somber indentation here and there, and, further down, away down below, at the base of the mountains, he pretended that he could trace out Thiers.

He said, in an animated fashion: "Look, look! Just in front of my finger, exactly in front of my finger. For my part, I can see it quite distinctly."

She could see nothing, but she was not surprised at his power of vision, for he looked like a bird of prey, with his round, piercing eyes, which appeared to be as powerful as telescopes. He went on:

"The Allier flows in front of us, in the middle of that plain, but it is impossible to perceive it. It is very far off, thirty kilometers from here."

She scarcely took the trouble to glance toward the place which he indicated, for she had riveted her eyes on the rock and given it her entire attention. She was saying to herself that presently this enormous stone would no longer exist, that it would disappear in powder, and she felt herself seized with a vague pity for the stone, the pity which a little girl would feel for a broken plaything. It had been there so long, this stone; and then it was imposing —it had a picturesque look. The two men, who had by this time risen, were heaping up pebbles at the foot of it, and digging with the rapid movements of peasants working hurriedly.

The crowd gathered along the road, increasing every moment, had pushed forward to get a better view. The brats brushed against the two diggers, and kept rushing and capering round them like young animals in a state of delight; and from the elevated point at which Christiane was sitting, these people looked quite small, a crowd of insects, an ant-hill in confusion.

The buzz of voices ascended, now slight, scarcely noticeable, then more lively, a confused mixture of cries and human movements, but scattered through the air, evaporated already—a dust of sounds, as it were. On the knoll likewise the crowd was swelling in numbers, incessantly arriving from the village, and covering up the slope which looked down on the condemned rock.

They were distinguished from each other, as they gathered together, according to their hotels, their classes, their castes. The most clamorous portion of the assemblage was that of the actors and musicians, presided over and generaled by the conductor, Petrus Martel of the Odéon, who, under the circumstances, had given up his incessant game of billiards.

With a Panama flapping over his forehead, a black alpaca jacket covering his shoulders and allowing his big stomach to protrude in a semicircle, for he considered a waistcoat useless in the open country, the actor, with his thick mustache, assumed the airs of a commander-in-chief, and pointed out, explained, and criticised all the movements of the two Oriols. His subordinates, the comedian Lapalme, the young premier Petitnivelle, and the musicians, the *maestro* Saint Landri, the pianist Javel, the huge flautist Noirot, the double-bass Nicordi, gathered round him to listen. In front of them were seated three women, sheltered by three parasols, a white, a red, and a blue, which, under the sun of two o'clock, formed a strange and dazzling French flag. These were Mademoiselle Odelin, the young actress; her mother,—a mother that she had hired out, as Gontran put it,—and the female attendant of the coffee-room, three ladies who were habitual companions. The arrangement of these three parasols so as to suit the national colors was an invention of Petrus Martel, who, having noticed at the commencement of the season the blue and the white in the hands of the ladies Odelin, had made a present of the red to the coffee-room attendant.

Quite close to them, another group excited interest and observation, that of the chefs and scullions of the hotels, to the number of eight, for there was a war of rivalry between the kitchen-folk, who had attired themselves in linen jackets to make an impression on the bystanders, extending even to the scullery-maids. Standing all in a group they let the crude light of day fall on their flat white caps, presenting, at the same time, the appearance of fantastic staff-officers of lancers and a deputation of cooks.

The Marquis asked Doctor Honorat: "Where do all these people come from? I never would have imagined Enval was so thickly populated!"

"Oh! they come from all parts, from Chatel-Guyon, from Tournoel, from La Roche-Pradière, from Saint-Hippolyte. For this affair has been talked of a long time in the country, and then Père Oriol is a celebrity, an important personage on account of his influence and his wealth, besides a true Auvergnat, remaining still a peasant, working himself, hoarding, piling up gold on gold, intelligent, full of ideas and plans for his children's future."

Gontran came back, excited, his eyes sparkling.

He said, in a low tone: "Paul, Paul, pray come along with me; I'm going to show you two pretty girls; yes, indeed, nice girls, you know!"

The other raised his head, and replied: "My dear fellow, I'm in very good quarters here; I'll not budge."

"You're wrong. They are charming!" Then, in a louder tone: "But the doctor is going to tell me who they are. Two little girls of eighteen or nineteen, rustic ladies, oddly dressed, with black silk dresses that have close-fitting sleeves, some kind of uniform dresses, convent-gowns—two brunettes—"

Doctor Honorat interrupted him: "That's enough. They are Père Oriol's daughters, two pretty young girls indeed, educated at the Benedictine Convent at Clermont, and sure to make very good matches. They are two types, but simply types of our race, of the fine race of women of Auvergne, Marquis. I will show you these two little lasses—"

Gontran here slyly interposed: "You are the medical adviser of the Oriol family, doctor?"

The other appreciated this sly question, and simply responded with a "By Jove, I am!" uttered in a tone of the utmost good-humor.

The young man went on: "How did you come to win the confidence of this rich patient?"

"By ordering him to drink a great deal of good wine." And he told a number of anecdotes about the Oriols. Moreover, he was distantly related to them, and had known them for a considerable time. The old fellow, the father, quite an original, was very proud of his wine; and above all he had one vine-garden, the produce of which was reserved for the use of the family, solely for the family and their guests. In certain years they happened to empty the casks filled with the growth of this aristocratic vineyard, but in other years they scarcely succeeded in doing so. About the month of May or June, when the father saw that it would be hard to drink all that was still left, he would proceed to encourage his big son, Colosse, and would repeat: "Come on, son, we must finish it." Then they would go on pouring down their throats pints of red wine from morning till night. Twenty times during every meal, the old chap would say in a grave tone, while he held the jug over his son's glass: "We must finish it." And, as all this liquor with its mixture of alcohol heated his blood and prevented him from sleeping, he would rise up in the middle of the night, draw on his breeches, light a lantern, wake up Colosse, and off they would go to the cellar, after snatching a crust of bread each out of the cupboard, in order to steep it in their glasses, filled up again and again out of the same cask. Then, when they had swallowed so much wine that they could feel it rolling about in their stomachs, the father would tap the resounding wood of the cask to find out whether the level of the liquor had gone down.

The Marquis asked: "Are these the same people that are working at the hillock?"

"Yes, yes, exactly."

Just at that moment the two men hurried off with giant strides from the rock charged with powder, and all the crowd that surrounded them down below began to run away like a retreating army. They fled in the direction of Riom and Enval, leaving behind them by itself the huge rock on the top of the hillock covered with thin grass and pebbles, for it divided the vineyard into two sections, and its immediate surroundings had not been grubbed up yet.

The crowd assembled on the slope above, now as dense as that below, waited in trembling expectancy; and the loud voice of Petrus Martel exclaimed:

"Attention! the fuse is lit!"

Christiane shivered at the thought of what was about to happen, but the doctor murmured behind her back:

"Ho! if they left there all the fuse I saw them buying, we'll have ten minutes of it!"

All eyes were fixed on the stone, and suddenly a dog, a little black dog, a kind of pug, was seen approaching it. He ran round it, began smelling, and no doubt, discovered a suspicious odor, for he commenced yelping as loudly as ever he could, his paws stiff, the hair on his back standing on end, his tail sticking out, and his ears erect.

A burst of laughter came from the spectators, a cruel burst of laughter; people expressed a hope that he would not keep riveted to the spot up to the time of the blast. Then voices called out to him to make him come back; some men whistled to him; they tried to hit him with stones to prevent him from going on the whole way. But the pug did not budge an inch, and kept barking furiously at the rock.

Christiane began to tremble. A horrible fear of seeing the animal disemboweled took possession of her; all her enjoyment was at an end. She cried repeatedly, with nerves unstrung, stammering, vibrating all over with anguish:

"Oh! good heavens! Oh! good heavens! it will be killed. I don't want to look at it! I don't want to look at it! I will not wait to see it! Come away!"

Paul Bretigny, who had been sitting by her side, arose, and, without saying one word, began to descend toward the hillock with all the speed of which his long legs were capable.

Cries of terror escaped from many lips; a panic agitated the crowd; and the pug, seeing this big man coming toward him, took refuge behind the rock. Paul pursued him; the dog ran off to the other side; and, for a minute or two, they kept rushing round the stone, now to right, now to left, as if they were playing a game of hide and seek. Seeing at last that he could not overtake the animal, the young man proceeded to reascend the slope, and the dog, seized once more with fury, renewed his barking.

Vociferations of anger greeted the return of the imprudent youth, who was quite out of breath, for people do not forgive those who excite terror in their breasts. Christiane was suffocating with emotion, her two hands pressed against her palpitating heart. She had lost her head so completely that she sobbed: "At least you are not hurt?" while Gontran cried angrily:

"He is mad, that idiot; he never does anything but tomfooleries of this kind. I never met a greater donkey!"

But the soil was now shaking; it rose in air. A formidable detonation made the entire country all around vibrate, and for a full minute thundered over the mountain, while all the echoes repeated it, like so many cannon-shots.

Christiane saw nothing but a shower of stones falling, and a high column of light clay sinking in a heap. And immediately afterward the crowd from above rushed down like a wave, uttering wild shouts. The battalion of kitchen-drudges came racing down in the direction of the knoll, leaving behind them the regiment of theatrical performers, who descended more slowly, with Petrus Martel at their head. The three parasols forming a tricolor were nearly carried away in this descent.

And all ran, men, women, peasants, and villagers. They could be seen falling, getting up again, starting on afresh, while in long procession the two streams of people, which had till now been kept back by fear, rolled along so as to knock against one another and get mixed up on the very spot where the explosion had taken place.

"Let us wait a while," said the Marquis, "till all this curiosity is satisfied, so that we may go and look in our turn."

The engineer, M. Aubry-Pasteur, who had just arisen with very great difficulty, replied:

"For my part, I am going back to the village by the footpaths. There is nothing further to keep me here."

He shook hands, bowed, and went away.

Doctor Honorat had disappeared. The party talked about him, and the Marquis said to his son:

"You have only known him three days, and all the time you have been laughing at him. You will end by offending him."

But Gontran shrugged his shoulders: "Oh! he's a wise man, a good sceptic, that doctor. I tell you in reply that he will not bother himself. When we are both alone together, he laughs at all the world and everything, commencing with his patients and his waters. I will give you a free thermal course if you ever see him annoyed by my nonsense."

Meanwhile, there was considerable agitation further down around the site of the vanished hillock. The enormous crowd, swelling, rising up, and sinking down like billows, broke out into exclamations, manifestly swayed by some emotion, some astonishing occurrence which nobody had foreseen. Andermatt, ever eager and inquisitive, was repeating:

"What is the matter with them now? What can be the matter with them?"

Gontran announced that he was going to find out, and walked off. Christiane, who had now sunk into a state of indifference, was reflecting that if the igniting substance had been only a little shorter, it would have been sufficient to have caused the death of their foolish companion or led to his being mutilated by the blasting of the rock, and all because she was afraid of a dog losing its life. She could not help thinking that he must, indeed, be very violent and passionate — this man — to expose himself to such a risk in this way without any good reason for it — simply owing to the fact that a woman who was a stranger to him had given expression to a desire.

People could be observed running along the road toward the village. The Marquis now asked, in his turn: "What is the matter with them?" And Andermatt, unable to stand it any longer, began to run down the side of the hill. Gontran, from below, made a sign to him to come on.

Paul Bretigny asked: "Will you take my arm, Madame?" She took his arm, which seemed to her as immovable as iron, and, as her feet glided along the warm grass, she leaned on it as she would have leaned on a baluster with a sense of absolute security. Gontran, who had just come back after making inquiries, exclaimed: "It is a spring. The explosion has made a spring gush out!"

And they fell in with the crowd. Then, the two young men, Paul and Gontran, moving on in front, scattered the spectators by jostling against them, and without paying any heed to their gruntings, opened a way for Christiane and her father. They walked through a chaos of sharp stones, broken, and blackened with powder, and arrived in front of a hole full of muddy water which bubbled up and then flowed away toward the river over the feet of the bystanders. Andermatt was there already, having effected a passage through the multitude by insinuating ways peculiar to himself, as Gontran used to say, and was watching with rapt attention the water escaping through the broken soil.

Doctor Honorat, facing him at the opposite side of the hole, was observing him with an air of mingled surprise and boredom.

Andermatt said to him: "It might be desirable to taste it; it is perhaps a mineral spring."

The physician returned: "No doubt it is mineral. There are any number of mineral waters here. There will soon be more springs than invalids."

The other in reply said: "But it is necessary to taste it."

The physician displayed little or no interest in the matter: "It is necessary at least to wait till we see whether it is clean."

And everyone wanted to see. Those in the second row pushed those in front almost into the muddy water. A child fell in, and caused a laugh. The Oriols, father and son, were there, contemplating gravely this unexpected phenomenon, not knowing yet what they ought to think about it. The father was a spare man, with a long, thin frame, and a bony head—the hard head of a beardless peasant; and the son, taller still, a giant, thin also, and wearing a mustache, had the look at the same time of a trooper and a vinedresser.

The bubblings of the water appeared to increase, its volume to grow larger, and it was beginning to get clearer. A movement took place among the people, and Doctor Latonne appeared with a glass in his hand. He perspired, panted, and stood quite stupefied at the sight of his brother-physician, Doctor Honorat, with one foot planted at the side of the newly discovered spring, like a general who has been the first to enter a fortress.

He asked, breathlessly: "Have you tasted it?"

"No, I am waiting to see whether 'tis clear."

Then Doctor Latonne thrust his glass into it, and drank with that solemnity of visage which experts assume when tasting wines. After that, he exclaimed, "Excellent!" which in no way compromised him, and extending the glass toward his rival said: "Do you wish to taste it?"

But Doctor Honorat, decidedly, had no love for mineral waters, for he smilingly replied:

"Many thanks! 'Tis quite sufficient that you have appreciated it. I know the taste of them."

He did know the taste of them all, and he appreciated it, too, though in quite a different fashion. Then, turning toward Père Oriol said:

"'Tisn't as good as your excellent vine-growth."

The old man was flattered. Christiane had seen enough, and wanted to go away. Her brother and Paul once more forced a path for her through the populace. She followed them, leaning on her father's arm. Suddenly she slipped and was near falling, and glancing down at her feet she saw that she had stepped on a piece of bleeding flesh, covered with black hairs and sticky with mud. It was a portion of the pug-dog, who had been mangled by the explosion and trampled underfoot by the crowd. She felt a choking sensation, and was so much moved that she could not restrain her tears. And she murmured, as she dried her eyes with her handkerchief: "Poor little animal! poor little animal!"

She wanted to know nothing more about it. She wished to go back, to shut herself up in her room. That day, which had begun so pleasantly, had ended sadly for her. Was it an omen? Her heart, shriveling up, beat with violent palpitations. They were now alone on the road, and in front of them they saw a tall hat and the two skirts of a frock-coat flapping like wings. It was Doctor Bonnefille, who had been the last to hear the news, and who was now rushing to the spot, glass in hand, like Doctor Latonne.

When he recognized the Marquis, he drew up.

"What is this I hear, Marquis? They tell me it is a spring—a mineral spring?"

"Yes, my dear doctor."

"Abundant?"

"Why, yes."

"Is it true that—that they are there?"

Gontran replied with an air of gravity: "Why, yes, certainly; Doctor Latonne has even made the analysis already."

Then Doctor Bonnefille began to run, while Christiane, a little tickled and enlivened by his face, said:

"Well, no, I am not going back yet to the hotel. Let us go and sit down in the park."

Andermatt had remained at the site of the knoll, watching the flowing of the water.

CHAPTER III.

Bargaining

The *table d'hôte* was noisy that evening at the Hotel Splendid. The blasting of the hillock and the discovery of the new spring gave a brisk impetus to conversation. The diners were not numerous, however, — a score all told,— people usually taciturn and quiet, patients who, after having vainly tried all the well-known waters, had now turned to the new stations. At the end of the table occupied by the Ravenels and the Andermatts were, first, the Monecus, a little man with white hair and face and his daughter, a very pale, big girl, who sometimes rose up and went out in the middle of a meal, leaving her plate half full; fat M. Aubry-Pasteur, the ex-engineer; the Chaufours, a family in black, who might be met every day in the walks of the park behind a little vehicle which carried their deformed child, and the ladies Paille, mother and daughter, both of them widows, big and strong, strong everywhere, before and behind. "You may easily see," said Gontran, "that they ate up their husbands; that's how their stomachs got affected." It was, indeed, for a stomach affection that they had come to the station.

Further on, a man of extremely red complexion, brick-colored, M. Riquier, whose digestion was also very indifferent, and then other persons with bad complexions, travelers of that mute class who usually enter the dining-rooms of hotels with slow steps, the wife in front, the husband behind, bow as soon as they have passed the door, and then take their seats with a timid and modest air.

All the other end of the table was empty, although the plates and the covers were laid there for the guests of the future.

Andermatt talked in an animated fashion. He had spent the afternoon chatting with Doctor Latonne, giving vent in a flood of words to vast schemes with reference to Enval. The doctor had enumerated to him, with burning conviction, the wonderful qualities of his water, far superior to those of Chatel-Guyon, whose reputation nevertheless had been definitely established for the last ten years. Then, at the right, they had that hole of a place, Royat, at the height of success, and at the left, that other hole, Chatel-Guyon, which had lately been set afloat. What could they not do with Enval, if they knew how to set about it properly?

He said, addressing the engineer: "Yes, Monsieur, there's where it all is, to know the way to set about it. It is all a matter of skill, of tact, of opportunism, and of audacity. In order to establish a spa, it is necessary to know how to launch it, nothing more, and in order to launch it, it is necessary to interest the great medical body of Paris in the matter. I, Monsieur, always succeed in what I undertake, because I always seek the practical method, the only one that should determine success in every particular case with which I occupy myself; and, as long as I have not discovered it, I do nothing — I wait. It is not enough to have the water, it is necessary to get people to drink it; and to get people to drink it, it is not enough to get it cried up as unrivaled in the newspapers and elsewhere; it is necessary to know how to get this discreetly said by the only men who have influence on the public that will drink it, on the invalids whom we require, on the peculiarly credulous public that pays for drugs — in short, by the physicians. You can only address a Court of Justice through the mouths of advocates; it will only hear them, and understands only them. So you can only address the patient through the doctors — he listens only to them."

The Marquis, who greatly admired the practical common sense of his son-in-law, exclaimed:

"Ah! how true this is! Apart from this, my dear boy, you are unique for giving the right touch."

Andermatt, who was excited, went on: "There is a fortune to be made here. The country is admirable, the climate excellent. One thing alone disturbs my mind — would we have water enough for a large establishment? — for things that are only half done always miscarry. We would require a very large establishment, and consequently a great deal of water, enough of water to supply two hundred baths at the same time, with a rapid and continuous current; and the new spring added to the old one, would not supply fifty, whatever Doctor Latonne may say about it—"

M. Aubry-Pasteur interrupted him. "Oh! as for water, I will give you as much as you want of it."

Andermatt was stupefied. "You?"

"Yes, I. That astonishes you? Let me explain myself. Last year, I was here about the same time as this year, for I really find myself improved by the Enval baths. Now one morning, I lay asleep in my own room, when a stout gentleman arrived. He was the president of the governing body of the establishment. He was in a state of great agitation, and the cause of it was this: the Bonnefille Spring had lowered so much that there were some apprehensions lest it might entirely disappear. Knowing that I was a mining engineer, he had come to ask me if I could not find a means of saving the establishment.

"I accordingly set about studying the geological system of the country. You know that in each stratum of the soil original disturbances have led to different changes and conditions in the surface of the ground. The question, therefore, was to discover how the mineral water came—by what fissures—and what were the direction, the origin, and the nature of these fissures. I first inspected the establishment with great care, and, noticing in a corner an old disused pipe of a bath, I observed that it was already almost stopped up with limestone. Now the water, by depositing the salts which it contained on the coatings of the ducts, had rapidly led to an obstruction of the passage. It would inevitably happen likewise in the natural passages in the soil, this soil being granitic. So it was that the Bonnefille Spring had stopped up. Nothing more. It was necessary to get at it again farther on.

"Most people would have searched above its original point of egress. As for me, after a month of study, observation, and reasoning, I sought for and found it fifty meters lower down. And this was the explanation of the matter: I told you before that it was first necessary to determine the origin, nature, and direction of the fissures in the granite which enabled the water to spring forth. It was easy for me to satisfy myself that these fissures ran from the plain toward the mountain and not from the mountain toward the plain, inclined like a roof undoubtedly, in consequence of a depression of this plain which in breaking up had carried along with it the primitive buttresses of the mountains. Accordingly, the water, in place of descending, rose up again between the different interstices of the granitic layers. And I then discovered the cause of this unexpected phenomenon.

"Formerly the Limagne, that vast expanse of sandy and argillaceous soil, of which you can scarcely see the limits, was on a level with the first table-land of the mountains; but owing to the geological character of its lower portions, it subsided, so as to tear away the edge of the mountain, as I explained to you a moment ago. Now this immense sinking produced, at the point of separating the earth and the granite, an immense barrier of clay of great depth and impenetrable by liquids. And this is what happens: The mineral water comes from the beds of old volcanoes. That which comes from the greatest distance gets cooled on its way, and rises up perfectly cold like ordinary springs; that which comes from the volcanic beds that are nearer gushes up still warm, at varying degrees of heat, according to the distance of the subterranean fire.

"Here is the course it pursues. It is expelled from some unknown depths, up to the moment when it meets the clay barrier of the Limagne. Not being able to pass through it, and pushed on by enormous pressure, it seeks a vent. Finding then the inclined gaps of granite, it gets in there, and reascends to the point at which they reach the level of the soil. Then, resuming its original direction, it again proceeds to flow toward the plain along the ordinary bed of the streams. I may add that we do not see the hundredth part of the mineral waters of these glens. We can only discover those whose point of egress is open. As for the others, arriving as they do at the side of the fissures in the granite under a thick layer of vegetable and cultivated soil, they are lost in the earth, which absorbs them.

"From this I draw the conclusion: first, that to have the water, it is sufficient to search by following the inclination and the direction of the superimposed strips of granite; secondly, that in order to preserve it, it is enough to prevent the fissures from being stopped up by calcareous deposits, that is to say, to maintain carefully the little artificial wells by digging; thirdly, that in order to obtain the adjoining spring, it is necessary to get at it by means of a practical sounding as far as the same fissure of granite below, and not above, it being well understood that you must place yourself at the side of the barrier of clay which forces the waters to reascend. From this point of view, the spring discovered to-day is admirably situated only some meters away from this barrier. If you want to set up a new establishment, it is here you should erect it."

When he ceased speaking, there was an interval of silence.

Andermatt, ravished, said merely: "That's it! When you see the curtain drawn, the entire mystery vanishes. You are a most valuable man, M. Aubry-Pasteur."

Besides him, the Marquis and Paul Bretigny alone had understood what he was talking about. Gontran had not heard a single word. The others, with their ears and mouths open, while the engineer was talking, were simply stupefied with amazement. The ladies Paille especially, being very religious women, asked themselves if this explanation of a phenomenon ordained by God and accomplished by mysterious means had not in it something profane. The mother thought she ought to say: "Providence is very wonderful." The ladies seated at the center of the table conveyed their approval by nods of the head, disturbed also by listening to these unintelligible remarks.

M. Riquier, the brick-colored man, observed: "They may well come from volcanoes or from the moon, these Enval waters—here have I been taking them ten days, and as yet I experience no effect from them!"

M. and Madame Chaufour protested in the name of their child, who was beginning to move the right leg, a thing that had not happened during the six years they had been nursing him.

Riquier replied: "That proves, by Jove, that we have not the same ailment; it doesn't prove that the Enval water cures affections of the stomach." He seemed in a rage, exasperated by this fresh, useless experiment.

But M. Monecu also spoke in the name of his daughter, declaring that for the last eight days she was beginning to be able to retain food without being obliged to go out at every meal. And his big daughter blushed, with her nose in her plate. The ladies Paille likewise thought they had improved.

Then Riquier was vexed, and abruptly turning toward the two women said:

"Your stomachs are affected, Mesdames."

They replied together: "Why, yes, Monsieur. We can digest nothing."

He nearly leaped out of his chair, stammering: "You—you! Why, 'tis enough to look at you. Your stomachs are affected, Mesdames. That is to say, you eat too much."

Madame Paille, the mother, became very angry, and she retorted: "As for you, Monsieur, there is no doubt about it, you exhibit certainly the appearance of persons whose stomachs are destroyed. It has been well said that good stomachs make nice men."

A very thin, old lady, whose name was not known, said authoritatively: "I am sure everyone would find the waters of Enval better if the hotel chef would only bear in mind a little that he is cooking for invalids. Truly, he sends us up things that it is impossible to digest."

And suddenly the entire table agreed on the point, and indignation was expressed against the hotel-keeper, who served them with crayfish, porksteaks, salt eels, cabbage, yes, cabbage and sausages, all the most indigestible kinds of food in the world for persons for whom Doctors Bonnefille, Latonne, and Honorat had prescribed only white meats, lean and tender, fresh vegetables, and milk diet.

Riquier was shaking with fury: "Why should not the physicians inspect the table at thermal stations without leaving such an important thing as the selection of nutriment to the judgment of a brute? Thus, every day, they give us hard eggs, anchovies, and ham as side-dishes — "

M. Monecu interrupted him: "Oh! excuse me! My daughter can digest nothing well except ham, which, moreover has been prescribed for her by Mas-Roussel and Remusot."

Riquier exclaimed: "Ham! ham! why, that's poison, Monsieur."

And an interminable argument arose, which each day was taken up afresh, as to the classification of foods. Milk itself was discussed with passionate warmth. Riquier could not drink a glass of claret and milk without immediately suffering from indigestion.

Aubry-Pasteur, in answer to his remarks, irritated in his turn, observed that people questioned the properties of things which he adored:

"Why, gracious goodness, Monsieur, if you were attacked with dyspepsia and I with gastralgia, we would require food as different as the glass of the spectacles that suits short-sighted and long-sighted people, both of whom, however, have diseased eyes."

He added: "For my part I begin to choke when I swallow a glass of red wine, and I believe there is nothing worse for man than wine. All water-drinkers live a hundred years, while we—"

Gontran replied with a laugh: "Faith, without wine and without marriage, I would find life monotonous enough."

The ladies Paille lowered their eyes. They drank a considerable quantity of Bordeaux of the best quality without any water in it, and their double widowhood seemed to indicate that they had applied the same treatment to their husbands, the daughter being twenty-two and the mother scarcely forty.

But Andermatt, usually so chatty, remained taciturn and thoughtful. He suddenly asked Gontran: "Do you know where the Oriols live?"

"Yes, their house was pointed out to me a little while ago."

"Could you bring me there after dinner?"

"Certainly. It will even give me pleasure to accompany you. I shall not be sorry to have another look at the two lassies."

And, as soon as dinner was over, they went off, while Christiane, who was tired, went up with the Marquis and Paul Bretigny to spend the rest of the day in the drawing-room.

It was still broad daylight, for they dine early at thermal stations.

Andermatt took his brother-in-law's arm.

"My dear Gontran, if this old man is reasonable, and if the analysis realizes Doctor Latonne's expectations, I am probably going to try a big stroke of business here—a spa. I am going to start a spa!"

He stopped in the middle of the street, and seized his companion by both sides of his jacket.

"Ha! you don't understand, fellows like you, how amusing business is, not the business of merchants or traders, but big undertakings such as we go in for! Yes, my boy, when they are properly understood, we find in them everything that men care for—they cover, at the same time, politics, war, diplomacy, everything, everything! It is necessary to be always searching, finding, inventing, to understand everything, to foresee everything, to combine everything, to dare everything. The great battle to-day is being fought by means of money. For my part, I see in the hundred-sou pieces raw recruits in red breeches, in the twenty-franc pieces very glittering lieutenants, captains in the notes for a hundred francs, and in those for a thousand I see generals. And I fight, by heavens! I fight from morning till night against all the world, with all the world. And this is how to live, how to live on a big scale, just as the mighty lived in days of yore. We are the mighty of to-day—there you are—the only true mighty ones!

"Stop, look at that village, that poor village! I will make a town of it, yes, I will, a lovely town full of big hotels which will be filled with visitors, with elevators, with servants, with carriages, a crowd of rich folk served by a crowd of poor; and all this because it pleased me one evening to fight with Royat, which is at the right, with Chatel-Guyon, which is at the left, with Mont Doré, La Bourboule, Châteauneuf, Saint Nectaire, which are behind us, with Vichy, which is facing us. And I shall succeed because I have the means, the only means. I have seen it in one glance, just as a great general sees the weak side of an enemy. It is necessary too to know how to lead men, in our line of business, both to carry them along with us and to subjugate them.

"Good God! life becomes amusing when you can do such things. I have now three years of pleasure to look forward to with this town of mine. And then see what a chance it is to find this engineer, who told us such interesting things at dinner, most interesting things, my dear fellow. It is as clear as day, my system. Thanks to it, I can smash the old company, without even having any necessity of buying it up."

He then resumed his walk, and they quietly went up the road to the left in the direction of Chatel-Guyon."

Gontran presently observed: "When I am walking by my brother-in-law's side, I feel that the same noise disturbs his brain as that heard in the gambling rooms at Monte Carlo — that noise of gold moved about, shuffled, drawn away, raked off, lost or gained."

Andermatt did, indeed, suggest the idea of a strange human machine, constructed only for the purpose of calculating and debating about money, and mentally manipulating it. Moreover, he exhibited much vanity about his special knowledge of the world, and plumed himself on his power of estimating at one glance of his eye the actual value of anything whatever. Accordingly, he might be seen, wherever he happened to be, every moment taking up an article, examining it, turning it round, and declaring: "This is worth so much."

His wife and his brother-in-law, diverted by this mania, used to amuse themselves by deceiving him, exhibiting to him queer pieces of furniture and asking him to estimate them; and when he remained perplexed, at the sight of their unexpected finds, they would both burst out laughing like fools. Sometimes also, in the street at Paris, Gontran would stop in front of a warehouse and force him to make a calculation of an entire shop-window, or perhaps of a horse with a jolting vehicle, or else again of a luggage-van laden with household goods.

One evening, while seated at his sister's dinner-table before fashionable guests, he called on William to tell him what would be the approximate value of the Obelisk; then, when the other happened to name some figure, he would put the same question as to the Solferino Bridge, and the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile. And he gravely concluded: "You might write a very interesting work on the valuation of the principal monuments of the globe." Andermatt never got angry, and fell in with all his pleasantries, like a superior man sure of himself.

Gontran having asked one day: "And I—how much am I worth?" William declined to answer; then, as his brother-in-law persisted, saying: "Look here! If I should be captured by brigands, how much would you give to release me?" he replied at last: "Well, well, my dear fellow, I would give a bill." And his smile said so much that the other, a little disconcerted, did not press the matter further.

Andermatt, besides, was fond of artistic objects, and having fine taste and appreciating such things thoroughly, he skillfully collected them with that bloodhound's scent which he carried into all commercial transactions.

They had arrived in front of a house of a middle-class type. Gontran stopped him and said: "Here it is." An iron knocker hung over a heavy oaken door; they knocked, and a lean servant-maid came to open it.

The banker asked: "Monsieur Oriol?"

The woman said: "Come in."

They entered a kitchen, a big farm-kitchen, in which a little fire was still burning under a pot; then they were ushered into another part of the house, where the Oriol family was assembled.

The father was asleep, seated on one chair with his feet on another. The son, with both elbows on the table, was reading the "Petit Journal" with the spasmodic efforts of a feeble intellect always wandering; and the two girls, in the recess of the same window, were working at the same piece of tapestry, having begun it one at each end.

They were the first to rise, both at the same moment, astonished at this unexpected visit; then, big Jacques raised his head, a head congested by the pressure of his brain; then, at last, Père Oriol waked up, and took down his long legs from the second chair one after the other.

The room was bare, with whitewashed walls, a stone flooring, and furniture consisting of straw seats, a mahogany chest of drawers, four engravings by Epinal with glass over them, and big white curtains.

They were all staring at each other, and the servant-maid, with her petticoat raised up to her knees, was waiting at the door, riveted to the spot by curiosity.

Andermatt introduced himself, mentioning his name as well as that of his brother-in-law, Count de Ravenel, made a low bow to the two young girls, bending his head with extreme politeness, and then calmly seated himself, adding:

"Monsieur Oriol, I came to talk to you about a matter of business. Moreover, I will not take four roads to explain myself. See here. You have just discovered a spring on your property. The analysis of this water is to be made in a few days. If it is of no value, you will understand that I will have nothing to do with it; if, on the contrary, it fulfills my anticipations, I propose to buy from you this piece of ground, and all the lands around it. Think on this. No other person but myself could make you such an offer. The old company is nearly bankrupt; it will not, therefore, have the least notion of building a new establishment, and the ill success of this enterprise will not encourage fresh attempts. Don't give me an answer to-day. Consult your family. When the analysis is known you will fix your price. If it suits me, I will say 'yes'; if it does not suit me, I will say 'no.' I never haggle for my part."

The peasant, a man of business in his own way, and sharp as anyone could be, courteously replied that he would see about it, that he felt honored, that he would think it over—and then he offered them a glass of wine.

Andermatt made no objection, and, as the day was declining, Oriol said to his daughters, who had resumed their work, with their eyes lowered over the piece of tapestry: "Let us have some light, girls."

They both got up together, passed into an adjoining room, then came back, one carrying two lighted wax-candles, the other four wineglasses without stems, glasses such as the poor use. The wax-candles were fresh looking and were garnished with red paper — placed, no doubt, by way of ornament on the young girl's mantelpiece.

Then, Colosse rose up; for only the male members of the family visited the cellar. Andermatt had an idea. "It would give me great pleasure to see your cellar. You are the principal vinedresser of the district, and it must be a very fine one."

Oriol, touched to the heart, hastened to conduct them, and, taking up one of the wax-candles, led the way. They had to pass through the kitchen again, then they got into a court where the remnant of daylight that was left enabled them to discern empty casks standing on end, big stones of giant granite in a corner pierced with a hole in the middle, like the wheels of some antique car of colossal size, a dismounted winepress with wooden screws, its brown divisions rendered smooth by wear and tear, and glittering suddenly in the light thrown by the candle on the shadows that surrounded it. Close to it, the working implements of polished steel on the ground had the glitter of arms used in warfare. All these things gradually grew more distinct, as the old man drew nearer to them with the candle in his hand, making a shade of the other.

Already they got the smell of the wine, the pounded grapes drained dry. They arrived in front of a door fastened with two locks. Oriol opened it, and quickly raising the candle above his head vaguely pointed toward a long succession of barrels standing in a row, and having on their swelling flanks a second line of smaller casks. He showed them first of all that this cellar, all on one floor, sank right into the mountain, then he explained the contents of its different casks, the ages, the nature of the various vine-crops, and their merits; then, having reached the supply reserved for the family, he caressed the cask with his hand just as one might rub the crupper of a favorite horse, and in a proud tone said:

"You are going to taste this. There's not a wine bottled equal to it — not one, either at Bordeaux or elsewhere."

For he possessed the intense passion of countrymen for wine kept in a cask.

Colosse followed him, carrying a jug, stooped down, turned the cock of the funnel, while his father cautiously held the light for him, as though he were accomplishing some difficult task requiring minute attention. The candle's flame fell directly on their faces, the father's head like that of an old attorney, and the son's like that of a peasant soldier.

Andermatt murmured in Gontran's ear: "Hey, what a fine Teniers!"

The young man replied in a whisper: "I prefer the girls."

Then they went back into the house. It was necessary, it seemed, to drink this wine, to drink a great deal of it, in order to please the two Oriols.

The lassies had come across to the table where they continued their work as if there had been no visitors. Gontran kept incessantly staring at them, asking himself whether they were twins, so closely did they resemble one another. One of them, however, was plumper and smaller, while the other was more ladylike. Their hair, dark-brown rather than black, drawn over their temples in smooth bands, gleamed with every slight movement of their heads. They had the rather heavy jaw and forehead peculiar to the people of Auvergne, cheek-bones somewhat strongly marked, but charming mouths, ravishing eyes, with brows of rare neatness, and delightfully fresh complexions. One felt, on looking at them, that they had not been brought up in this house, but in a select boarding-school, in the convent to which the daughters of the aristocracy of Auvergne are sent, and that they had acquired there the well-bred manners of cultivated young ladies.

Meanwhile, Gontran, seized with disgust before this red glass in front of him, pressed Andermatt's foot to induce him to leave. At length he rose, and they both energetically grasped the hands of the two peasants; then they bowed once more ceremoniously, the young girls each responding with a slight nod, without again rising from their seats.

As soon as they had reached the village, Andermatt began talking again.

"Hey, my dear boy, what an odd family! How manifest here is the transition from people in good society. A son's services are required to cultivate the vine so as to save the wages of a laborer,—stupid economy,—however, he discharges this function, and is one of the people. As for the girls, they are like girls of the better class—almost quite so already.

Let them only make good matches, and they would pass as well as any of the women of our own class, and even much better than most of them. I am as much gratified at seeing these people as a geologist would be at finding an animal of the tertiary period."

Gontran asked: "Which do you prefer?"

"Which? How, which? Which what?"

"Of the lassies?"

"Oh! upon my honor, I haven't an idea on the subject. I have not looked at them from the standpoint of comparison. But what difference can this make to you? You have no intention to carry off one of them?"

Gontran began to laugh: "Oh! no, but I am delighted to meet for once fresh women, really fresh, fresh as women never are with us. I like looking at them, just as you like looking at a Teniers. There is nothing pleases me so much as looking at a pretty girl, no matter where, no matter of what class. These are my objects of vertu. I don't collect them, but I admire them — I admire them passionately, artistically, my friend, in the spirit of a convinced and disinterested artist. What would you have? I love this! By the bye, could you lend me five thousand francs?"

The other stopped, and murmured an "Again!" energetically.

Gontran replied, with an air of simplicity: "Always!" Then they resumed their walk.

Andermatt then said: "What the devil do you do with the money?"

"I spend, it."

"Yes, but you spend it to excess."

"My dear friend, I like spending money as much as you like making it. Do you understand?"

"Very fine, but you don't make it."

"That's true. I know it. One can't have everything. You know how to make it, and, upon my word, you don't at all know how to spend it. Money appears to you no use except to get interest on it. I, on the other hand, don't know how to make it, but I know thoroughly how to spend it. It procures me a thousand things of which you don't know the name. We were cut out for brothers-in-law. We complete one another admirably."

Andermatt murmured: "What stuff! No, you sha'n't have five thousand francs, but I'll lend you fifteen hundred francs, because — because in a few days I shall, perhaps, have need of you."

Gontran rejoined: "Then I accept them on account." The other gave him a slap on the shoulder without saying anything by way of answer.

They reached the park, which was illuminated with lamps hung to the branches of the trees. The orchestra of the Casino was playing in slow time a classical piece that seemed to stagger along, full of breaks and silences, executed by the same four performers, exhausted with constant playing, morning and evening, in this solitude for the benefit of the leaves and the brook, with trying to produce the effect of twenty instruments, and tired also of never being fully paid at the end of the month. Petrus Martel always completed their remuneration, when it fell short, with hampers of wine or pints of liqueurs which the bathers might have left unconsumed.

Amid the noise of the concert could also be distinguished that of the billiard-table, the clicking of the balls and the voices calling out: "Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two."

Andermatt and Gontran went in. M. Aubry-Pasteur and Doctor Honorat, by themselves, were drinking their coffee, at the side facing the musicians. Petrus Martel and Lapalme were playing their game with desperation; and the female attendant woke up to ask:

"What do these gentlemen wish to take?"

CHAPTER IV.

A Test and an Avowal

Père Oriol and his son had remained for a long time chatting after the girls had gone to bed. Stirred up and excited by Andermatt's proposal, they were considering how they could inflame his desire more effectually without compromising their own interests. Like the cautious, practically-minded peasants that they were, they weighed all the chances carefully, understanding very clearly that in a country in which mineral springs gushed out along all the streams, it was not advisable to repel by an exaggerated demand this unexpected enthusiast, the like of whom they might never find again. And at the same time it would not do either to leave entirely in his hands this spring, which might, some day, yield a flood of liquid money, Royat and Chatel-Guyon serving as a precedent for them.

Therefore, they asked themselves by what course of action they could kindle into frenzy the banker's ardor; they conjured up combinations of imaginary companies covering his offers, a succession of clumsy schemes, the defects of which they felt, without succeeding in inventing more ingenious ones. They slept badly; then, in the morning, the father, having awakened first, thought in his own mind that the spring might have disappeared during the night. It was possible, after all, that it might have gone as it had come, and re-entered the earth, so that it could not be brought back. He got up in a state of unrest, seized with avaricious fear, shook his son, and told him about his alarm; and big Colosse, dragging his legs out of his coarse sheets, dressed himself in order to go out with his father, to make sure about the matter.

In any case, they would put the field and the spring in proper trim themselves, would carry off the stones, and make it nice and clean, like an animal that they wanted to sell. So they took their picks and their spades, and started for the spot side by side with great, swinging strides.

They looked at nothing as they walked on, their minds being preoccupied with the business, replying with only a single word to the "Good morning" of the neighbors and friends whom they chanced to meet. When they reached the Riom road they began to get agitated, peering into the distance to see whether they could observe the water bubbling up and glittering in the morning sun. The road was empty, white, and dusty, the river running beside it sheltered by willow-trees. Beneath one of the trees Oriol suddenly noticed two feet, then, having advanced three steps further, he recognized Père Clovis seated at the edge of the road, with his crutches lying beside him on the grass.

This was an old paralytic, well known in the district, where for the last ten years he had prowled about on his supports of stout oak, as he said himself, like a poor man made of stone.

Formerly a poacher in the woods and streams, often arrested and imprisoned, he had got rheumatic pains by his long watchings stretched on the moist grass and by his nocturnal fishings in the rivers, through which he used to wade up to his middle in water. Now he whined, and crawled about, like a crab that had lost its claws. He stumped along, dragging his right leg after him like a piece of ragged cloth. But the boys of the neighborhood, who used in foggy weather to run after the girls or the hares, declared that they used to meet Père Clovis, swift-footed as a stag, and supple as an adder, under the bushes and in the glades, and that, in short, his rheumatism was only "a dodge on the gendarmes." Colosse, especially, insisted on maintaining that he had seen him, not once, but fifty times, straining his neck with his crutches under his arms.

And Père Oriol stopped in front of the old vagabond, his mind possessed by an idea which as yet was undefined, for the brain works slowly in the thick skulls of Auvergne. He said "Good morning" to him. The other responded "Good morning." Then they spoke about the weather, the ripening of the vine, and two or three other things; but, as Colosse had gone ahead, his father with long steps hastened to overtake him.

The spring was still flowing, clear by this time, and all the bottom of the hole was red, a fine, dark red, which had arisen from an abundant deposit of iron. The two men gazed at it with smiling faces, then they proceeded to clear the soil that surrounded it, and to carry off the stones of which they made a heap. And, having found the last remains of the dead dog, they buried them with jocose remarks. But all of a sudden Père Oriol let his spade fall. A roguish leer of delight and triumph wrinkled the corners of his leathery lips and the edges of his cunning eyes, and he said to his son: "Come on, till we see."

The other obeyed. They got on the road once more, and retraced their steps. Père Clovis was still toasting his limbs and his crutches in the sun.

Oriol, drawing up before him, asked: "Do you want to earn a hundred-franc piece?"

The other cautiously refrained from answering.

The peasant said: "Hey! a hundred francs?"

Thereupon the vagabond made up his mind, and murmured: "Of course, but what am I asked to do?"

"Well, father, here's what I want you to do."

And he explained to the other at great length with tricky circumlocutions, easily understood hints, and innumerable repetitions, that, if he would consent to take a bath for an hour every day from ten to eleven in a hole which they, Colosse and he, intended to dig at the side of the spring, and to be cured at the end of a month, they would give him a hundred francs in cash.

The paralytic listened with a stupid air, and then said: "Since all the drugs haven't been able to help me, 'tisn't your water that'll cure me."

But Colosse suddenly got into a passion. "Come, my old play-actor, you're talking rubbish. I know what your disease is — don't tell me about it! What were you doing on Monday last in the Comberombe wood at eleven o'clock at night?"

The old fellow promptly answered: "That's not true."

But Colosse, firing up: "Isn't it true, you old blackguard, that you jumped over the ditch to Jean Cannezat and that you made your way along the Paulin chasm?"

The other energetically repeated: "It is not true!"

"Isn't it true that I called out to you: 'Oho, Clovis, the gendarmes!' and that you turned up the Moulinet road?"

"No, it is not."

Big Jacques, raging, almost menacing, exclaimed: "Ah! it's not true! Well, old three paws, listen! The next time I see you there in the wood at night or else in the water, I'll take a grip of you, as my legs are rather longer than your own, and I'll tie you up to some tree till morning, when we'll go and take you away, the whole village together—"

Père Oriol stopped his son; then, in a very wheedling tone: "Listen, Clovis! you can easily do the thing. We prepare a bath for you, Coloche and myself. You come there every day for a month. For that I give you, not one hundred, but two hundred francs. And then, listen! if you're cured at the end of the month, it will mean five hundred francs more. Understand clearly, five hundred in ready money, and two hundred more—that makes seven hundred. Therefore you get two hundred for taking a bath for a month and five hundred more for the curing. And listen again! Suppose the pains come back. If this happens you in the autumn, there will be nothing more for us to do, for the water will have none the less produced its effect!"

The old fellow coolly replied: "In that case I'm quite willing. If it won't succeed, we'll always see it." And the three men pressed one another's hands to seal the bargain they had concluded. Then, the two Oriols returned to their spring, in order to dig the bath for Père Clovis.

They had been working at it for a quarter of an hour, when they heard voices on the road. It was Andermatt and Doctor Latonne. The two peasants winked at one another, and ceased digging the soil.

The banker came across to them, and grasped their hands; then the entire four proceeded to fix their eyes on the water without uttering a word. It stirred about like water set in movement above a big fire, threw out bubbles and steam, then it flowed away in the direction of the brook through a tiny gutter which it had already traced out. Oriol, with a smile of pride on his lips, said suddenly: "Hey, that's iron, isn't it?"

In fact the bottom was now all red, and even the little pebbles which it washed as it flowed along seemed covered with a sort of purple mold.

Doctor Latonne replied: "Yes, but that is nothing to the purpose. We would require to know its other qualities."

The peasant observed: "Coloche and myself first drank a glass of it yesterday evening, and it has already made our bodies feel fresh. Isn't that true, son?"

The big youth replied in a tone of conviction: "Sure enough, it was very refreshing."

Andermatt remained motionless, his feet on the edge of the hole. He turned toward the physician: "We would want nearly six times this volume of water for what I would wish to do, would we not?"

"Yes, nearly."

"Do you think that we'll be able to get it?"

"Oh! as for me, I know nothing about it."

"See here! The purchase of the grounds can only be definitely effected after the soundings. It would be necessary, first of all, to have a promise of sale drawn up by a notary, once the analysis is known, but not to take effect unless the consecutive soundings give the results hoped for."

Père Oriol became restless. He did not understand. Andermatt thereupon explained to him the insufficiency of only one spring, and demonstrated to him that he could not purchase unless he found others. But he could not search for these other springs till after the signature of a promise of sale.

The two peasants appeared forthwith to be convinced that their fields contained as many springs as vine-stalks. It would be sufficient to dig for them—they would see, they would see.

Andermatt said simply: "Yes, we shall see."

But Père Oriol dipped his fingers in the water, and remarked: "Why, 'tis hot enough to boil an egg, much hotter than the Bonnefille one!"

Latonne in his turn steeped his fingers in it, and realized that this was possible.

The peasant went on: "And then it has more taste and a better taste; it hasn't a false taste, like the other. Oh! this one, I'll answer for it, is good! I know the waters of the country for the fifty years that I've seen them flowing. I never seen a finer one than this, never, never!"

He remained silent for a few seconds, and then continued: "It is not in order to puff the water that I say this!—certainly not. I would like to make a trial of it before you, a fair trial, not what your chemists make, but a trial of it on a person who has a disease. I'll bet that it will cure a paralytic, this one, so hot is it and so good to taste—I'll make a bet on it!"

He appeared to be searching his brain, then cast a look at the tops of the neighboring mountains to see whether he could discover the paralytic that he required. Not having made the discovery, he lowered his eyes to the road.

Two hundred meters away from it, at the side of the road could be distinguished the two inert legs of the vagabond, whose body was hidden by the trunk of a willow tree.

Oriol placed his hand on his forehead as a shade, and said questioningly to his son: "That isn't Père Clovis over there still?"

Colosse laughingly replied: "Yes, yes. 'Tis he—he doesn't go as quick as a hare."

Then Oriol stepped over to Andermatt's side, and with an air of serious and deep conviction: "Look here, Monchieu! Listen to me. There's a paralytic over yonder, who is well known to the doctor, a genuine one, who hasn't been seen to make a single step for the last ten years. Isn't that so, doctor?"

Latonne returned: "Oh! if you cure that fellow, I would pay a franc a glass for your water!"

Then, turning toward Andermatt: "'Tis an old fellow suffering from rheumatic gout with a sort of spasmodic contraction of the left leg and a complete paralysis of the right; in fact, I believe, an incurable."

Oriol had allowed him to talk; he resumed in a deliberate fashion: "Well, doctor, would you like to make a trial of it on him for a month? I don't say that it will succeed,—I say nothing on the matter,—I only ask to have a trial made. Hold on! Coloche and myself are going to dig a hole for the stones—well, we'll make a hole for Cloviche; he'll remain an hour there every morning, and then we'll see—there!—we'll see."

The physician murmured: "You may try. I answer confidently that you will not succeed."

But Andermatt, beguiled by the prospect of an almost miraculous cure, gladly fell in with the peasant's suggestion; and the entire four directed their steps toward the vagabond, who, all this time, had been lying motionless in the sun. The old poacher, understanding the dodge, pretended to refuse, resisted for a long time, then allowed himself to be persuaded, on the condition that Andermatt would give him two francs a day for the hour which he would spend in the water.

So the matter was settled. It was even decided that, as soon as the hole was dug, Père Clovis should take his bath that very day. Andermatt would supply him with clothes to dress himself afterward, and the two Oriols would bring him a disused shepherd's hut, which was lying in their yard, so that the invalid might shut himself in there, and change his apparel.

Then the banker and the physician returned to the village. When they reached it, they parted, the doctor going to his own house for his consultations, and Andermatt hurrying to attend on his wife, who had to come to the establishment at half past nine o'clock.

She appeared almost immediately, dressed from head to foot in pink—with a pink hat, a pink parasol, and a pink complexion, she looked like an aurora, and she descended the steps of the hotel to avoid the turn of the road with the hopping movements of a bird, as it goes from stone to stone, without opening its wing. As soon as she saw her husband, she exclaimed:

"Oh! what a pretty country it is! I am quite delighted with it."

A few bathers wandering sadly through the little park in silence turned round as she passed by, and Petrus Martel, who was smoking his pipe in his shirt-sleeves at the window of the billiard-room, called to his chum, Lapalme, sitting in a corner before a glass of white wine, and said, smacking the roof of his mouth with his tongue:

"Deuce take it, there's something sweet!"

Christiane made her way into the establishment, bowed smilingly toward the cashier, who sat at the left of the entrance-door, and saluted the ex-jailer seated at the right with a "Good morning"; then, holding out a ticket to a bath-attendant dressed like the girl in the refreshment-room, followed her into a corridor facing the doors of the bath-rooms. The lady was shown into one of them, rather large, with bare walls, furnished with a chair, a glass, and a shoe-horn, while a large oval orifice, coated, like the floor, with yellow cement, served the purposes of a bath.

The woman turned a cock like those used for making the street-gutters flow, and the water gushed through a little round grated aperture at the bottom of the bath so that it was soon full to the brim, and its overflow was diverted through a furrow sunk into the wall.

Christiane, having left her chambermaid at the hotel, declined the attendant's services in undressing, and remained there alone, saying that if she required anything, she would ring, and would do the same when she wanted her linen.

She slowly disrobed, watching as she did so the almost invisible movement of the wave gently stirring on the clear surface of the basin. When she had divested herself of all her clothing she dipped her foot in, and the pleasant warm sensation mounted to her throat; then she plunged into the tepid water first one leg, and after it the other, and sat down in the midst of this caressing heat, in this transparent bath, in this spring, which flowed over her, around her, covering her body with tiny globules all along her legs, all along her arms, and also all over her breasts. She noticed with surprise those particles of air innumerable and minute which clothed her from head to foot with an entire mail-suit of little pearls. And these pearls, so minute, flew off incessantly from her white flesh, and evaporated on the surface of the bath, driven on by others that sprung to life over her form. They sprung up over her skin, like light fruits incapable of being grasped yet charming, the fruits of this exquisite body rosy and fresh, which had generated those pearls in the water.

And Christiane felt herself so happy in it, so sweetly, so softly, so deliciously caressed and clasped by the restless wave, the living wave, the animated wave from the spring which gushed up from the depths of the basin under her legs and fled through the little opening toward the edge of the bath, that she would have liked to have remained there forever, without moving, almost without thinking. The sensation of a calm delight composed of rest and comfort, of tranquil dreamfulness, of health, of discreet joy, and silent gaiety, entered into her with the soothing warmth of this. And her spirit mused, vaguely lulled into repose by the gurgling of the overflow which was escaping — dreamed of what she would be doing by and by, of what she would be doing to-morrow, of promenades, of her father, of her husband, of her brother, and of that big boy who had made her feel slightly ill at ease since the adventure of the dog. She did not care for persons of violent tendencies.

No desire agitated her soul, calm as her heart in this grateful moist warmth, no desires save the shadowy hopes of a child, no desire of any other life, of emotion, or passion. She felt that it was well with her, and she was satisfied with the happiness of her lot.

She was suddenly startled — the door flew open; it was the Auvergnat carrying the linen. Twenty minutes had passed; it was already time for her to be dressed. It was almost a pang, almost a calamity, this awakening ; she felt a longing to beg of the woman to give her a few minutes more; then she reflected that every day she would find again the same delight, and she regretfully left the bath to be wrapped in a white dressing-gown whose scorching heat felt somewhat unpleasant.

Just as she was going out, Doctor Bonnefille opened the door of his consultation-room and invited her to enter, bowing ceremoniously. He inquired about her health, felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, took note of her appetite and her digestion, asked her how she slept, and then accompanied her to the door, repeating:

"Come, come, that's right, that's right. My respects, if you please, to your father, one of the most distinguished men that I have met in my career."

At last, she got away, bored by these undesirable attentions, and at the door she saw the Marquis chatting with Andermatt, Gontran, and Paul Bretigny. Her husband, in whose head every new idea was continually buzzing, like a fly in a bottle, was relating the story of the paralytic, and wanted to go back to see whether the vagabond was taking his bath. They were about to go with him to the spot in order to please him. But Christiane very gently detained her brother, and, when they were a short distance away from the others:

"Tell me now! I wanted to talk to you about your friend; I must say I don't much care for him. Explain to me exactly what he is like."

And Gontran, who had known Paul for many years, told her about this passionate nature, uncouth, sincere, and kindly by starts. He was, according to Gontran, a clever young fellow, whose wild spirit impetuously flung itself into every new idea. Yielding to every impulse, unable to control or to direct his passions, or to fight against his feelings with the aid of reason, or to govern his life by a system based on settled convictions, he obeyed the promptings of his heart, whether they were virtuous or vicious, the moment that any desire, any thought, any emotion whatever, agitated his excitable nature.

He had already fought seven duels, as ready to insult people as to become their friend. He had been madly in love with women of every class, adored them with the same transports from the working-girl whom he picked up in the corner of some store to the actress whom he carried off, yes, carried off, on the night of a first performance, just as she was stepping into a vehicle on her way home, bearing her away in his arms in the midst of the astonished spectators, and pushing her into a carriage, which disappeared at a gallop before anyone could follow it or overtake it.

And Gontran concluded: "There you are! He is a good fellow, but a fool; very rich, moreover, and capable of anything, of anything at all, when he loses his head."

Christiane said: "What a strange perfume he carries about him! It is rather nice. What is it?"

Gontran answered: "I don't really know; he doesn't want to tell about it. I believe it comes from Russia. 'Tis the actress, his actress, she whom I cured him of this time, that gave it to him. Yes, indeed, it has a very pleasant odor."

They saw, on their way, a group of bathers and of peasants, for it was the custom every morning before breakfast to take a turn along the road.

Christiane and Gontran joined the Marquis, Andermatt, and Paul, and soon they beheld, in the place where the knoll had stood the day before, a queer-looking human head covered with a ragged felt hat, and wearing a big white beard, looking as if it had sprung up out of the ground, the head of a decapitated man, as it were, growing there like a plant. Around it, some vinedressers were looking on, amazed, impassive, the peasantry of Auvergne not being scoffers, while three tall gentlemen, visitors at second-class hotels, were laughing and joking.

Oriol and his son stood there contemplating the vagabond, who was steeped in his hole, sitting on a stone, with the water up to his chin. He might have been taken for a desperate criminal of olden times condemned to death for some unusual kind of sorcery; and he had not let go his crutches, which were by his sides in the water.

Andermatt kept repeating enthusiastically: "Bravo! bravo! there's an example which all the people in the country suffering from rheumatic pains should imitate."

And, bending toward the old man, he shouted at him as if he were deaf: "Do you feel well?"

The other, who seemed completely stupefied by this boiling water, replied: "It seems to me that I'm melting!"

But Père Oriol exclaimed: "The hotter it is, the more good it will do you."

A voice behind the Marquis said: "What is that?"

And M. Aubry-Pasteur, always puffing, stopped on his way back from his daily walk. Then Andermatt explained his experiment in curing. But the old man kept repeating: "Devil take it! how hot it is!" And he wanted to get out, asking some one to help him up. The banker succeeded eventually in calming him by promising him twenty sous more for each bath. The spectators formed a circle round the hole, in which the dirty, grayish rags were soaking wherewith this old body was covered.

A voice said: "Nice meat for broth! I wouldn't care to make soup of it!"

Another rejoined: "The meat would scarcely agree with me!"

But the Marquis observed that the bubbles of carbonic acid seemed more numerous, larger, and brighter in this new spring than in that of the baths.

The vagabond's rags were covered with them; and these bubbles rose to the surface in such abundance that the water appeared to be crossed by innumerable little chains, by an infinity of beads of exceedingly small, round diamonds, the strong midday sun making them as clear as brilliants.

Then Aubry-Pasteur burst out laughing: "Egad," said he, "I must tell you what they do at the establishment. You know they catch a spring like a bird in a kind of snare, or rather in a bell. That's what they call coaxing it. Now last year here is what happened to the spring that supplies the baths. The carbonic acid, lighter than water, was stored up to the top of the bell; then, when it was collected there in a very large quantity, it was driven back into the ducts, reascended in abundance into the baths, filled up the compartments, and all but suffocated the invalids. We have had three accidents in the course of three months. Then they consulted me again, and I invented a very simple apparatus consisting of two pipes which led off separately the liquid and the gas in the bell in order to combine them afresh immediately under the bath, and thus to reconstitute the water in its normal state while avoiding the dangerous excess of carbonic acid. But my apparatus would have cost a thousand francs. Do you know what the custodian does then? I give you a thousand guesses to find out. He bores a hole in the bell to get rid of the gas, which flies out, you understand, so that they sell you acidulated baths without any acid, or so little acid that it is not worth much. Whereas here, why just look!"

Everybody became indignant. They no longer laughed, and they cast envious looks toward the paralytic. Every bather would gladly have seized a pickax to make another hole beside that of the vagabond. But Andermatt took the engineer's arm, and they went off chatting together. From time to time Aubry-Pasteur stopped, made a show of drawing lines with his walking-stick, indicating certain points, and the banker wrote down notes in a memorandum-book.

Christiane and Paul Bretigny entered into conversation. He told her about his journey to Auvergne, and all that he had seen and experienced. He loved the country, with those warm instincts of his, with which always mingled an element of animality. He had a sensual love of nature because it excited his blood, and made his nerves and organs quiver. He said: "For my part, Madame, it seems to me as if I were open, so that everything enters into me, everything passes through me, makes me weep or gnash my teeth. Look here! when I cast a glance at that hillside facing us, that vast expanse of green, that race of trees clambering up the mountain, I feel the entire wood in my eyes; it penetrates me, takes possession of me, runs through my whole frame; and it seems to me also that I am devouring it, that it fills my being—I become a wood myself!"

He laughed, while he told her this, strained his big, round eyes, now on the wood, now on Christiane; and she, surprised, astonished, but easily impressed, felt herself devoured also, like the wood, by his great avid glance.

Paul went on: "And if you only knew what delights I owe to my sense of smell. I drink in this air through my nostrils. I become intoxicated with it; I live in it, and I feel that there is within it everything—absolutely everything. What can be sweeter? It intoxicates one more than wine; wine intoxicates the mind, but perfume intoxicates the imagination. With perfume you taste the very essence, the pure essence of things and of the universe—you taste the flowers, the trees, the grass of the fields; you can even distinguish the soul of the dwellings of olden days which sleep in the old furniture, the old carpets, the old curtains. Listen! I am going to tell you something.

"Did you notice, when first you came here, a delicious odor, to which no other odor can be compared—so fine, so light, that it seems almost—how shall I express it?—an immaterial odor? You find it everywhere—you can seize it nowhere—you cannot discern where it comes from. Never, never has anything more divine than it arisen in my heart. Well, this is the odor of the vine in bloom. Ah! it has taken me four days to discover it. And is it not charming to think, Madame, that the vine-tree, which gives us wine, wine which only superior spirits can understand and relish, gives us, too, the most delicate and most exciting of perfumes, which only persons of the most refined sensibility can discover? And then do you recognize also the powerful smell of the chestnut-trees, the luscious savor of the acacias, the aroma of the mountains, and the grass, whose scent is so sweet, so sweet—sweeter than anyone imagines?"

She listened to these words of his in amazement, not that they were surprising so much as that they appeared so different in their nature from everything encompassing her every day. Her mind remained possessed, moved, and disturbed by them.

He kept talking uninterruptedly in a voice somewhat hollow but full of passion.

"And again, just think, do you not feel in the air, along the roads, when the day is hot, a slight savor of vanilla. Yes, am I not right? Well, that is—that is—but I dare not tell it to you!"

And now he broke into a great laugh, and waving his hand in front of him all of a sudden said: "Look there!"

A row of wagons laden with hay was coming up drawn by cows yoked in pairs. The slow-footed beasts, with their heads hung down, bent by the yoke, their horns fastened with pieces of wood, toiled painfully along; and under their skin, as it rose up and down, the bones of their legs could be seen moving. Before each team, a man in shirt-sleeves, waistcoat, and black hat, was walking with a switch in his hand, directing the pace of the animals. From time to time the driver would turn round, and, without ever hitting, would barely touch the shoulder or the forehead of a cow who would blink her big, wandering eyes, and obey the motion of his arm.

Christiane and Paul drew up to let them pass.

He said to her: "Do you feel it?"

She was amazed: "What then? That is the smell of the stable."

"Yes, it is the smell of the stable; and all these cows going along the roads—for they use no horses in this part of the country—scatter on their way that odor of the stable, which, mingled with the fine dust, gives to the wind a savor of vanilla."

Christiane, somewhat disgusted, murmured: "Oh!"

He went on: "Excuse me, at that moment, I was analyzing it like a chemist. In any case, we are, Madame, in the most seductive country, the most delightful, the most restful, that I have ever seen—a country of the golden age. And the Limagne—oh! the Limagne! But I must not talk to you about it; I want to show it to you. You shall see for yourself."

The Marquis and Gontran came up to them. The Marquis passed his arm under that of his daughter, and, making her turn round and retrace her steps, in order to get back to the hotel for breakfast, he said:

"Listen, young people! this concerns you all three. William, who goes mad when an idea comes into his head, dreams of nothing any longer but of building this new town of his, and he wants to win over to him the Oriol family. He is, therefore, anxious that Christiane should make the acquaintance of the two young girls, in order to see if they are 'possible.' But it is not necessary that the father should suspect our ruse. So I have got an idea; it is to organize a charitable *fête*. You, my dear, must go and see the curé; you will together hunt up two of his parishioners to make collections along with you. You understand what people you will get him to nominate, and he will invite them on his own responsibility. As for you, young men, you are going to get up a *tombola* at the Casino with the assistance of Petrus Martel with his company and orchestra. And if the little Oriols are nice girls, as it is said they have been well brought up at the convent, Christiane will make a conquest of them."

CHAPTER V.

Developments

FOR eight days, Christiane wholly occupied herself with preparations for this *fête*. The curé, indeed, was able to find no one among his female parishioners except the Oriol girls who could be deemed worthy of collecting along with the Marquis de Ravenel's daughter; and, happy at having the opportunity of making himself prominent, he took all the necessary steps, organized everything, regulated everything, and himself invited the young girls, as if the idea had originated with him.

The inhabitants were in a state of excitement, and the gloomy bathers, finding a new topic of conversation, entertained one another at the *table d'hôte* with various estimates as to the possible receipts from the two portions of the *fête*, the sacred and the profane.

The day opened finely. It was admirable summer weather, warm and clear, with bright sunshine in the open plain and a grateful shade under the village trees. The mass was fixed for nine o'clock — a quick mass with Church music. Christiane, who had arrived before the office, in order to inspect the ornamentation of the church with garlands of flowers that had been sent from Royat and Clermont-Ferrand, consented to walk behind it. The curé, Abbé Litre, followed her accompanied by the Oriol girls, and he introduced them to her. Christiane immediately invited the young girls to luncheon. They accepted her invitation with blushes and respectful bows.

The faithful were now making their appearance. Christiane and her girls sat down on three chairs of honor reserved for them at the side of the choir, facing three other chairs, which were occupied by young lads dressed in their Sunday clothes, sons of the mayor, of the deputy, and of a municipal councilor, selected to accompany the lady-collectors and to flatter the local authorities. Everything passed off well.

The office was short. The collection realized one hundred and ten francs, which, added to Andermatt's five hundred francs, the Marquis's fifty francs, and a hundred francs contributed by Paul Bretigny, made a total of seven hundred and sixty, an amount never before reached in the parish of Enval. Then, after the conclusion of the ceremony, the Oriol girls were brought to the hotel. They appeared to be a little abashed, without any display of awkwardness, however, and scarcely uttered one word, through modesty rather than through timidity. They sat down to luncheon at the *table d'hôte*, and pleased the men — all the men.

The elder the more serious of the pair, the younger the more sprightly, the elder better bred, in the common-place acceptation of the word, the younger more pleasant, they yet resembled one another as closely as two sisters possibly could.

As soon as the meal was finished, they repaired to the Casino for the lottery-drawing at the *tombola,* which was fixed for two o'clock.

The park, already invaded by the mixed crowd of bathers and peasants, presented the aspect of an outlandish *fête.*

Under their Chinese *kiosque* the musicians were executing a rural symphony, a work composed by Saint Landri himself. Paul, who accompanied Christiane, suddenly drew up:

"Look here!" said he, "that's pretty! He has some talent, that chap! With an orchestra, he could produce a fine effect."

Then he asked: "Are you fond of music, Madame?"

"Exceedingly."

"As for me, it overwhelms me. When I am listening to a work that I like, it seems to me first that the opening notes detach my skin from my flesh, melt it, dissolve it, cause it to disappear, and leave me like one flayed alive, under the combined attacks of the instruments. And in fact it is on my nerves that the orchestra is playing, on my nerves stripped bare, vibrating, trembling at every note. I hear it, the music, not merely with my ears, but with all the sensibility of my body quivering from head to foot. Nothing gives me such exquisite pleasure, or rather such exquisite happiness."

She smiled, and then said: "Your sensibilities are keen."

"By Jove, they are! What is the good of living if one has not keen sensibilities? I do not envy those people who wear over their hearts a tortoise's shell or a hippopotamus's hide. Those alone are happy who feel their sensations acutely, who receive them like shocks, and savor them like dainty morsels. For it is necessary to reason out all our emotions, joyous and sad, to be satiated with them, to be intoxicated with them to the most intense degree of bliss or the most extreme pitch of suffering."

She raised her eyes to look up at his face, with that sense of astonishment which she had experienced during the past eight days at all the things that he said. Indeed, during these eight days, this new friend — for, despite her repugnance toward him, on first acquaintance, he had in this short interval become her friend — was every moment shaking the tranquillity of her soul, and disturbing it as a pool of water is disturbed by flinging stones into it. And he flung stones, big stones, into this soul which had calmly slumbered until now.

Christiane's father, like all fathers, had always treated her as a little girl, to whom one ought not to say anything of a serious nature; her brother made her laugh rather than reflect; her husband did not consider it right for a man to speak of anything whatever to his wife outside the interests of their common life; and so she had hitherto lived perfectly contented, her mind steeped in a sweet torpor.

This newcomer opened her intellect with ideas which fell upon it like strokes of a hatchet. Moreover, he was one of those men who please women, all women, by his very nature, by the vibrating acuteness of his emotions. He knew how to talk to them, to tell them everything, and he made them understand everything. Incapable of continuous effort but extremely intelligent, always loving or hating passionately, speaking of everything with the ingenious ardor of a man fanatically convinced, variable as he was enthusiastic, he possessed to an excessive degree the true feminine temperament, the credulity, the charm, the mobility, the nervous sensibility of a woman, with the superior intellect, active, comprehensive, and penetrating, of a man.

Gontran came up to them in a hurry. "Come back," said he, "and give a look at the Honorat family."

They returned, and saw Doctor Honorat, accompanied by a fat, old woman in a blue dress, whose head looked like a nursery-garden, for every variety of plants and flowers were gathered together on her head.

Christiane asked in astonishment: "This is his wife, then? But she is fifteen years older than her husband."

"Yes, she is sixty-five—an old midwife whom he fell in love with between two confinements. This, however, is one of those households in which they are nagging at one another from morning till night."

They made their way toward the Casino, attracted by the exclamations of the crowd. On a large table, in front of the establishment, were displayed the lots of the *tombola*, which were drawn by Petrus Martel, assisted by Mademoiselle Odelin of the Odéon, a very small brunette, who also announced the numbers, with mountebank's tricks, which greatly diverted the spectators. The Marquis, accompanied by the Oriol girls and Andermatt, reappeared, and asked: "Are we to remain here? It is very noisy."

They accordingly resolved to take a walk halfway up the hill on the road from Enval to La Roche-Pradière. In order to reach it, they first ascended, one behind the other, a narrow path through vine-trees. Christiane walked on in front with a light and rapid step. Since her arrival in this neighborhood, she felt as if she existed in a new sort of way, with an active sense of enjoyment and of vitality which she had never known before. Perhaps, the baths, by improving her health, and so ridding her of that slight disturbance of the vital organs which annoyed and saddened her without any apparent cause, disposed her to perceive and to relish everything more thoroughly. Perhaps she simply felt herself animated, lashed by the presence and by the ardor of spirit of that unknown youth who had taught her how to understand. She drew a long, deep breath, as she thought of all he had said to her about the perfumes that were scattered through the atmosphere. "It is true," she mused, "that he has shown me how to feel the air." And she found again all the odors, especially that of the vine, so light, so delicate, so fleeting.

She gained the level road, and they formed themselves into groups. Andermatt and Louise Oriol, the elder girl, started first side by side, chatting about the produce of lands in Auvergne. She knew, this Auvergnat, true daughter of her sire, endowed with the hereditary instinct, all the correct and practical details of agriculture, and she spoke about them in her grave tone, in the ladylike fashion, and with the careful pronunciation which they had taught her at the convent. While listening to her, he cast a side glance at her, every now and then, and thought this little girl quite charming with her gravity of manner and her mind so full already of practical knowledge. He occasionally repeated with some surprise: "What! is the land in the Limagne worth so much as thirty thousand francs for each hectare?" *

"Yes, Monsieur, when it is planted with beautiful apple-trees, which supply dessert apples. It is our country which furnishes nearly all the fruit used in Paris."

Then, they turned back in order to make a more careful estimate of the Limagne, for from the road they were pursuing they could see, as far as their eyes could reach, the vast plain always covered with a light haze of blue vapor.

Christiane and Paul also halted in front of this immense veiled tract of country, so agreeable to the eye that they would have liked to remain there incessantly gazing at it. The road was bordered by enormous walnut-trees, the dense shade of which made the skin feel a refreshing sensation of coolness. It no longer ascended, but took a winding course halfway up on the slope of the hillside adorned lower down with a tapestry of vines, and then with short

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* A hectare is about two acres and a half.

green herbage as far as the crest, which at this point looked rather steep.

Paul murmured: "Is it not lovely? Tell me, is it not lovely? And why does this landscape move me? Yes, why? It diffuses a charm so profound, so wide, that it penetrates to my very heart. It seems, as you gaze at this plain, that thought opens its wings, does it not? And it flies away, it soars, it passes on, it goes off there below, farther and farther, toward all the countries seen in dreams which we shall never see. Yes, see here, this is worthy of admiration because it is much more like a thing we dream of than a thing that we have seen."

She listened to him without saying anything, waiting, expectant, gathering up each of his words; and she felt herself affected without too well knowing how to explain her emotions. She caught glimpses, indeed, of other countries, blue countries, rose-hued countries, countries unlikely and marvelous, countries undiscoverable though ever sought for, which make us look upon all others as commonplace.

He went on: "Yes, it is lovely, because it is lovely. Other horizons are more striking but less harmonious. Ah! Madame, beauty, harmonious beauty! There is nothing but that in the world. Nothing exists but beauty. But how few understand it! The line of a body, of a statue, or of a mountain, the color of a painting or of that plain, the inexpressible something of the 'Joconde,' a phrase that bites you to the soul, that—nothing more—which makes an artist a creator just like God, which, therefore, distinguishes him among men. Wait! I am going to recite for you two stanzas of Baudelaire."

And he declaimed:

"Whether you come from heaven or hell I do
not care,
O Beauty, monster of splendor and terror,
yet sweet at the core,
As long as your eye, your smile, your feet
lay the infinite bare,
Unveiling a world of love that I never have
known before!

"From Satan or God, what matter, whether
angel or siren you be,
What matter if you can give, enchanting,
velvet-eyed fay,
Rhythm, perfume, and light, and be
queen of the earth for me,
And make all things less hideous, and
the sad moments fly away."

Christiane now was gazing at him, struck with wonder by his lyricism, questioning him with her eyes, not comprehending well what extraordinary meaning might be embodied in this poetry. He divined her thoughts, and was irritated at not having communicated his own enthusiasm to her, for he had recited those verses very effectively, and he resumed, with a shade of disdain:

"I am a fool to wish to force you to relish a poet of such subtle inspiration. A day will come, I hope, when you will feel those things just as I do. Women, endowed rather with intuition than comprehension, do not seize the secret and veiled purposes of art in the same way as if a sympathetic appeal had first been made to their minds."

And, with a bow, he added: "I will strive, Madame, to make this sympathetic appeal."

She did not think him impertinent, but fantastic; and moreover she did not seek any longer to understand, suddenly struck by a circumstance which she had not previously noticed: he was very elegant, though he was a little too tall and too strongly-built, with a gait so virile that one could not immediately perceive the studied refinement of his attire. And then his head had a certain brutishness about it, an incompleteness, which gave to his entire person a somewhat heavy aspect at first glance. But when one had got accustomed to his features, one found in them some charm, a charm powerful and fierce, which at moments became very pleasant according to the inflections of his voice, which always seemed veiled.

Christiane said to herself, as she observed for the first time what attention he had paid to his external appearance from head to foot: "Decidedly this is a man whose qualities must be discovered one by one."

But here Gontran came rushing toward them. He exclaimed: "Sister, I say, Christiane, wait!" And when he had overtaken them, he said to them, still laughing: "Oh! just come and listen to the younger Oriol girl! She is as droll as anything—she has wonderful wit. Papa has succeeded in putting her at her ease, and she has been telling us the most comical things in the world. Wait for them."

And they awaited the Marquis, who presently appeared with the younger of the two girls, Charlotte Oriol. She was relating with a childlike, knowing liveliness some village tales, accounts of rustic simplicity and roguery. And she imitated them with their slow movements, their grave remarks, their "fouchtras," their innumerable "bougrres," mimicking, in a fashion that made her pretty, sprightly face look charming, all the changes of their physiognomies. Her bright eyes sparkled; her rather large mouth was opened wide, displaying her white teeth; her nose, a little tip-tilted, gave her a humorous look; and she was fresh, with a flower's freshness that might make lips quiver with desire.

The Marquis, having spent nearly his entire life on his estate, in the family château where Christiane and Gontran had been brought up in the midst of rough, big Norman farmers who were occasionally invited to dine there, in accordance with custom, and whose children, companions of theirs from the period of their first communion, had been on terms of familiarity with them, knew how to talk to this little girl, already three-fourths a woman of the world, with a friendly candor which awakened at once in her a gay and self-confident assurance.

Andermatt and Louise returned after having walked as far as the village, which they did not care to enter. And they all sat down at the foot of a tree, on the grassy edge of a ditch. There they remained for a long time pleasantly chatting about everything and nothing in a torpor of languid ease. Now and then, a wagon would roll past, always drawn by the two cows whose heads were bent and twisted by the yoke, and always driven by a peasant with a shrunken frame and a big black hat on his head, guiding the animals with the end of his thin switch in the swaying style of the conductor of an orchestra.

The man would take off his hat, bowing to the

Oriol girls, and they would reply with a familiar, "Good day," flung out by their fresh young voices.

Then, as the hour was growing late, they went back. As they drew near the park, Charlotte Oriol exclaimed: "Oh! the boree! the boree!" In fact, the boree was being danced to an old air well known in Auvergne.

There they were, male and female peasants stepping out, hopping, making courtesies,—turning and bowing to each other,—the women taking hold of their petticoats and lifting them up with two fingers of each hand, the men swinging their arms or holding them akimbo. The pleasant monotonous air was also dancing in the fresh evening wind; it was always the same refrain played in a very high note by the violin, and taken up in concert by the other instruments, giving a more rattling pace to the dance. And it was not unpleasant, this simple rustic music, lively and artless, keeping time as it did with this shambling country minuet.

The bathers, too, made an attempt to dance. Petrus Martel went skipping in front of little Odelin, who affected the style of a *danseuse* walking through a ballet, and the comic Lapalme mimicked a fantastic step round the attendant at the Casino, who seemed agitated by recollections of Bullier.

But suddenly Gontran saw Doctor Honorat dancing away with all his heart and all his limbs, and executing the classical boree like a true-blue native of Auvergne.

The orchestra became silent. All stopped. The doctor came over and bowed to the Marquis. He was wiping his forehead and puffing.

"'Tis good," said he, "to be young sometimes."

Gontran laid his hand on the doctor's shoulder, and smiling with a mischievous air: "You never told me you were married."

The physician stopped wiping his face, and gravely responded: "Yes, I am, and marred."

"What do you say?"

"I say, married and marred. Never commit that folly, young man."

"Why?"

"Why! See here! I have been married now for twenty years, and haven't got used to it yet. Every evening, when I reach home, I say to myself, 'Hold hard! this old woman is still in my house! So then she'll never go away?'" Everyone began to laugh, so serious and convinced was his tone.

But the bells of the hotel were ringing for dinner. The *fête* was over. Louise and Charlotte were accompanied back to their father's house; and when their new friends had left them, they commenced talking about them. Everyone thought them charming, Andermatt alone preferred the elder girl.

The Marquis said: "How pliant the feminine nature is! The mere vicinity of the paternal gold, of which they do not even know the use, has made ladies of these country girls."

Christiane, having asked Paul Bretigny: "And you, which of them do you prefer?" he murmured:

"Oh! I? I have not even looked at them. It is not they whom I prefer."

He had spoken in a very low voice; and she made no reply.

CHAPTER VI.

On the Brink

THE days that followed were charming for Christiane Andermatt. She lived, light-hearted, her soul full of joy. The morning bath was her first pleasure, a delicious pleasure that made the skin tingle, an exquisite half hour in the warm, flowing water, which disposed her to feel happy all day long. She was, indeed, happy in all her thoughts and in all her desires. The affection with which she felt herself surrounded and penetrated, the intoxication of youthful life throbbing in her veins, and then again this new environment, this superb country, made for day-dreams and repose, wide and odorous, enveloping her like a great caress of nature, awakened in her fresh emotions. Everything that approached, everything that touched her, continued this sensation of the morning, this sensation of a tepid bath, of a great bath of happiness wherein she plunged herself body and soul.

Andermatt, who had to leave Enval for a fortnight or perhaps a month, had gone back to Paris, having previously reminded his wife to take good care that the paralytic should not discontinue his course of treatment. So each day, before breakfast, Christiane, her father, her brother, and Paul, went to look at what Gontran called "the poor man's soup." Other bathers came there also, and they formed a circular group around the hole, while chatting with the vagabond.

He was not better able to walk, he declared, but he had a feeling as if his legs were covered with ants; and he told how these ants ran up and down, climbing as far as his thighs, and then going back again to the tips of his toes. And even at night he felt these insects tickling and biting him, so that he was deprived of sleep.

All the visitors and the peasants, divided into two camps, that of the believers and that of the sceptics, were interested in this cure.

After breakfast, Christiane often went to look for the Oriol girls, so that they might take a walk with her. They were the only members of her own sex at the station to whom she could talk or with whom she could have friendly relations, sharing a little of her confidence and asking in return for some feminine sympathy. She had at once taken a liking for the grave common sense allied with amiability which the elder girl exhibited and still more for the spirit of sly humor possessed by the younger; and it was less to please her husband than for her own amusement that she now sought the friendship of the two sisters.

They used to set forth on excursions sometimes in a landau, an old traveling landau with six seats, got from a livery-man at Riom, and at other times on foot. They were especially fond of a little wild valley near Chatel-Guyon, leading toward the hermitage of Sans-Souci. Along the narrow road, which they slowly traversed, under the pine-trees, on the bank of the little river, they would saunter in pairs, each pair chatting together. At every stage along their track, where it was necessary to cross the stream, Paul and Gontran, standing on stepping-stones in the water, seized the women each with one arm, and carried them over with a jump, so as to deposit them at the opposite side. And each of these fordings changed the order of the pedestrians. Christiane went from one to another, but found the opportunity of remaining a little while alone with Paul Bretigny either in front or in the rear.

He had no longer the same ways while in her company as in the first days of their acquaintanceship; he was less disposed to laugh, less abrupt in manner, less like a comrade, but more respectful and attentive. Their conversations, however, assumed a tone of intimacy, and the things that concerned the heart held in them the foremost place. He talked to her about sentiment and love, like a man well versed in such subjects, who had sounded the depths of women's tenderness, and who owed to them as much happiness as suffering.

She, ravished and rather touched, urged him on to confidences with an ardent and artful curiosity. All that she knew of him awakened in her a keen desire to learn more, to penetrate in thought into one of those male existences of which she had got glimpses out of books, one of those existences full of tempests and mysteries of love. Yielding to her importunities, he told her each day a little more about his life, his adventures, and his griefs, with a warmth of language which his burning memories sometimes rendered impassioned, and which the desire to please made also seductive. He opened to her gaze a world till now unknown to her, found eloquent words to express the subtleties of desire and expectation, the ravages of growing hopes, the religion of flowers and bits of ribbons, all the little objects treasured up as sacred, the enervating effect of sudden doubts, the anguish of alarming conjectures, the tortures of jealousy, and the inexpressible frenzy of the first kiss.

And he knew how to describe all these things in a very seemly fashion, veiled, poetic, and captivating. Like all men who are perpetually haunted by desire and thoughts about woman he spoke discreetly of those whom he had loved with a fever that throbbed within him still. He recalled a thousand romantic incidents calculated to move the heart, a thousand delicate circumstances calculated to make tears gather in the eyes, and all those sweet futilities of gallantry which render amorous relationships between persons of refined souls and cultivated minds the most beautiful and most entrancing experiences that can be conceived.

All these disturbing and familiar chats, renewed each day and each day more prolonged, fell on Christiane's soul like grains cast into the earth. And the charm of this country spread wide around her, the odorous air, that blue Limagne, so vast that it seemed to make the spirit expand, those extinguished volcanoes on the mountain, furnaces of the antique world serving now only to warm springs for invalids, the cool shades, the rippling music of the streams as they rushed over the stones — all this, too, penetrated the heart and the flesh of the young woman, penetrated them and softened them like a soft shower of warm rain on soil that is yet virgin, a rain that will cause to bourgeon and blossom in it the flowers of which it had received the seed.

She was quite conscious that this youth was paying court to her a little, that he thought her pretty, even more than pretty; and the desire to please him spontaneously suggested to her a thousand inventions, at the same time designing and simple, to fascinate him and to make a conquest of him.

When he looked moved, she would abruptly leave him; when she anticipated some tender allusion on his lips, she would cast toward him, ere the words were finished, one of those swift, unfathomable glances which pierce men's hearts like fire. She would greet him with soft utterances, gentle movements of her head, dreamy gestures with her hands, or sad looks quickly changed into smiles, as if to show him, even when no words had been exchanged between them, that his efforts had not been in vain.

What did she desire? Nothing. What did she expect from all this? Nothing.

She amused herself with this solely because she was a woman, because she did not perceive the danger of it, because, without foreseeing anything, she wished to find out what he would do.

And then she had suddenly developed that native coquetry which lies hidden in the veins of all feminine beings. The slumbering, innocent child of yesterday had unexpectedly waked up, subtle and keen-witted, when facing this man who talked to her unceasingly about love. She divined the agitation that swept across his mind when he was by her side, she saw the increasing emotion that his face expressed, and she understood all the different intonations of his voice with that special intuition possessed by women who feel themselves solicited to love.

Other men had ere now paid attentions to her in the fashionable world without getting anything from her in return save the mockery of a playful young woman. Their commonplace flatteries diverted her; their looks of melancholy love filled her with merriment; and to all their manifestations of passion she responded only with derisive laughter. In the case of this man, however, she felt herself suddenly confronted with a seductive and dangerous adversary; and she had been changed into one of those clever creatures, instinctively clear-sighted, armed with audacity and coolness, who, so long as their hearts remain untrammeled, watch for, surprise, and draw men into the invisible net of sentiment.

As for him, he had, at first, thought her rather silly. Accustomed to women versed in intrigues, exercised in love just as an old soldier is in military maneuvers, skilled in all the wiles of gallantry and tenderness, he considered this simple heart commonplace, and treated it with a light disdain.

But, little by little, her ingenuousness had amused him, and then fascinated him; and yielding to his impressionable nature, he had begun to make her the object of his affectionate attentions. He knew full well that the best way to excite a pure soul was to talk incessantly about love, while exhibiting the appearance of thinking about others; and accordingly, humoring in a crafty fashion the dainty curiosity which he had aroused in her, he proceeded, under the pretense of confiding his secrets to her, to teach her what passion really meant, under the shadow of the wood.

He, too, found this play amusing, showed her, by all the little gallantries that men know how to display, the growing pleasure that he found in her society, and assumed the attitude of a lover without suspecting that he would become one in reality. And all this came about as naturally in the course of their protracted walks as it does to take a bath on a warm day, when you find yourself at the side of a river.

But, from the first moment when Christiane began to indulge in coquetry, from the time when she resorted to all the native skill of woman in beguiling men, when she conceived the thought of bringing this slave of passion to his knees, in the same way that she would have undertaken to win a game at croquet, he allowed himself to yield, this candid libertine, to the attack of this simpleton, and began to love her.

And now he became awkward, restless, nervous, and she treated him as a cat does a mouse. With another woman he would not have been embarrassed; he would have spoken out; he would have conquered by his irresistible ardor; with her he did not dare, so different did she seem from all those whom he had known. The others, in short, were women already singed by life, to whom everything might be said, with whom one could venture on the boldest appeals, murmuring close to their lips the trembling words which set the blood aflame. He knew his power, he felt that he was bound to triumph when he was able to communicate freely to the soul, the heart, the senses of her whom he loved, the impetuous desire by which he was ravaged.

With Christiane, he imagined himself by the side of a young girl, so great a novice did he consider her; and all his resources seemed paralyzed. And then he cared for her in a new sort of way, partly as a man cares for a child, and partly as he does for his betrothed. He desired her; and yet he was afraid of touching her, of soiling her, of withering her bloom. He had no longing to clasp her tightly in his arms, such as he had felt toward others, but rather to fall on his knees, to kiss her robe, and to touch gently with his lips, with an infinitely chaste and tender slowness, the little hairs about her temples, the corners of her mouth, and her eyes, her closed eyes, whose blue he could feel glancing out toward him, the charming glance awakened under the drooping lids. He would have liked to protect her against everyone and against everything, not to let her be elbowed by common people, gaze at ugly people, or go near unclean people. He would have liked to carry away the dirt of the street over which she walked, the pebbles on the roads, the brambles and the branches in the wood, to make all things easy and delicious around her, and to carry her always, so that she should never walk. And he felt annoyed because she had to talk to the other guests at the hotel, to eat the same food at the *table d'hôte*, and submit to all the disagreeable and inevitable little things that belong to everyday existence.

He knew not what to say to her so much were his thoughts absorbed by her; and his powerlessness to express the state of his heart, to accomplish any of the things that he wished to do, to testify to her the imperious need of devoting himself to her which burned in his veins, gave him some of the aspects of a chained wild beast, and, at the same time, made him feel a strange desire to break into sobs.

All this she perceived without completely understanding it, and felt amused by it with the malicious enjoyment of a coquette. When they had lingered behind the others, and she felt from his look that he was about to say something disquieting, she would abruptly begin to run, in order to overtake her father, and, when she got up to him, would exclaim: "Suppose we make a four-cornered game."

Four-cornered games served generally for the termination of the excursions. They looked out for a glade at the end of a wider road than usual, and they began to play like boys out for a walk.

The Oriol girls and Gontran himself took great delight in this amusement, which satisfied that incessant longing to run that is to be found in all young creatures. Paul Bretigny alone grumbled, beset by other thoughts; then, growing animated by degrees he would join in the game with more desperation than any of the others, in order to catch Christiane, to touch her, to place his hand abruptly on her shoulder or on her corsage.

The Marquis, whose indifferent and listless nature yielded in everything, as long as his rest was not disturbed, sat down at the foot of a tree, and watched his boarding-school at play, as he said. He thought this quiet life very agreeable, and the entire world perfect.

However, Paul's behavior soon alarmed Christiane. One day she even got afraid of him. One morning, they went with Gontran to the most remote part of the oddly-shaped gap which is called the End of the World. The gorge, becoming more and more narrow and winding, sank into the mountain. They climbed over enormous rocks; they crossed the little river by means of stepping-stones, and, having wheeled round a lofty crag more than fifty meters in height which entirely blocked up the cleft of the ravine, they found themselves in a kind of trench encompassed between two gigantic walls, bare as far as their summits, which were covered with trees and with verdure.

The stream formed a wide lake of bowl-like shape, and truly it was a wild-looking chasm, strange and unexpected, such as one meets more frequently in narratives than in nature. Now, on this day, Paul, gazing at the projections of the rocky eminence which barred them out from the road at the right where all pedestrians were compelled to halt, remarked that it bore traces of having been scaled. He said: "Why, we can go on farther."

Then, having clambered up the first ledge, not without difficulty, he exclaimed: "Oh! this is charming! a little grove in the water — come on, then!"

And, leaning backward, he drew Christiane up by the two hands, while Gontran, feeling his way, planted his feet on all the slight projections of the rock. The soil which had drifted down from the summit had formed on this ledge a savage and bushy garden, in which the stream ran across the roots. Another step, a little farther on, formed a new barrier of this granite corridor. They climbed it, too, —then a third; and they found themselves at the foot of an impassable wall from which fell, straight and clear, a cascade twenty meters high into a deep basin hollowed out by it, and buried under bindweeds and branches.

The cleft of the mountain had become so narrow that the two men, clinging on by their hands, could touch its sides. Nothing further could be seen, save a line of sky; nothing could be heard save the murmur of the water. It might have been taken for one of those undiscoverable retreats in which the Latin poets were wont to conceal the antique nymphs. It seemed to Christiane as if she had just intruded on the chamber of a fay.

Paul Bretigny said nothing. Gontran exclaimed: "Oh! how nice it would be if a woman white and rosy-red were bathing in that water!"

They returned. The first two shelves were as easy to descend, but the third frightened Christiane, so high and straight was it, without any visible steps. Bretigny let himself slip down the rock; then, stretching out his two arms toward her, "Jump," said he.

She would not venture. Not that she was afraid of falling, but she felt afraid of him, afraid above all of his eyes. He gazed at her with the avidity of a famished beast, with a passion which had grown ferocious; and his two hands extended toward her had such an imperious attraction for her that she was suddenly terrified and seized with a mad longing to shriek, to run away, to climb up the mountain perpendicularly to escape this irresistible appeal.

Her brother standing up behind her, cried: "Go on then!" and pushed her forward. Feeling herself falling she shut her eyes, and, caught in a gentle but powerful clasp, she felt, without seeing it, all the huge body of the young man, whose panting warm breath passed over her face. Then, she found herself on her feet once more, smiling, now that her terror had vanished, while Gontran descended in his turn.

This emotion having rendered her prudent, she took care, for some days, not to be alone with Bretigny, who now seemed to be prowling round her like the wolf in the fable round a lamb.

But a grand excursion had been planned. They were to carry provisions in the landau with six seats, and go to dine with the Oriol girls on the border of the little lake of Tazenat, which in the language of the country was called the "gour" of Tazenat, and then return at night by moonlight. Accordingly, they started one afternoon of a day of burning heat, under a devouring sun, which made the granite of the mountain as hot as the floor of an oven.

The carriage ascended the mountain-side drawn by three horses, blowing, and covered with sweat. The coachman was nodding on his seat, his head hanging down; and at the side of the road ran legions of green lizards. The heated atmosphere seemed filled with an invisible and oppressive dust of fire. Sometimes it seemed hard, unyielding, dense, as they passed through it, sometimes it stirred about and sent across their faces ardent breaths of flame in which floated an odor of resin in the midst of the long pine-wood.

Nobody in the carriage uttered a word. The three ladies, at the lower end, closed their dazzled eyes, which they shaded with their red parasols. The Marquis and Gontran, their foreheads wrapped round with handkerchiefs, had fallen asleep. Paul was looking toward Christiane, who was also watching him from under her lowered eyelids. And the landau, sending up a column of smoking white dust, kept always toiling up this interminable ascent.

When it had reached the plateau, the coachman straightened himself up, the horses broke into a trot; and they drove through a beautiful, undulating country, thickly-wooded, cultivated, studded with villages and solitary houses here and there. In the distance, at the left, could be seen the great truncated summits of the volcanoes. The lake of Tazenat, which they were going to see, had been formed by the last crater in the mountain chain of Auvergne. After they had been driving for three hours, Paul said suddenly: "Look here, the lava-currents!"

Brown rocks, fantastically twisted, made cracks in the soil at the border of the road. At the right could be seen a mountain, snub-nosed in appearance, whose wide summit had a flat and hollow look. They took a path, which seemed to pass into it through a triangular cutting; and Christiane, who was standing erect, discovered all at once, in the midst of a vast deep crater, a lovely lake, bright and round, like a silver coin. The steep slopes of the mountain, wooded at the right and bare at the left, sank toward the water, which they surrounded with a high inclosure, regular in shape. And this placid water, level and glittering, like the surface of a medal, reflected the trees on one side, and on the other the barren slope, with a clearness so complete that the edges escaped one's attention, and the only thing one saw in this funnel, in whose center the blue sky was mirrored, was a transparent, bottomless opening, which seemed to pass right through the earth, pierced from end to end up to the other firmament.

The carriage could go no farther. They got down, and took a path through the wooded side winding round the lake, under the trees, halfway up the declivity of the mountain. This track, along which only the woodcutters passed, was as green as a prairie; and, through the branches, they could see the opposite side, and the water glittering at the bottom of this mountain-lake.

Then they reached, through an opening in the wood, the very edge of the water, where they sat down upon a sloping carpet of grass, overshadowed by oak-trees.

They all stretched themselves on the green turf with sensuous and exquisite delight. The men rolled themselves about in it, plunged their hands into it; while the women, softly lying down on their sides, placed their cheeks close to it, as if to seek there a refreshing caress.

After the heat of the road, it was one of those sweet sensations so deep and so grateful that they almost amount to pure happiness.

Then once more the Marquis went to sleep; Gontran speedily followed his example. Paul began chatting with Christiane and the two young girls. About what? About nothing in particular. From time to time, one of them gave utterance to some phrase; another replied after a minute's pause, and the lingering words seemed torpid in their mouths like the thoughts within their minds.

But, the coachman having brought across to them the hamper which contained the provisions, the Oriol girls, accustomed to domestic duties in their own house, and still clinging to their active habits, quickly proceeded to unpack it, and to prepare the dinner, of which the party would by and by partake on the grass.

Paul lay on his back beside Christiane, who was in a reverie. And he murmured, in so low a tone that she scarcely heard him, so low that his words just grazed her ear, like those confused sounds that are borne on by the wind: "These are the best days of my life."

Why did these vague words move her even to the bottom of her heart? Why did she feel herself suddenly touched by an emotion such as she had never experienced before?

She was gazing through the trees at a tiny house, a hut for persons engaged in hunting and fishing, so narrow that it could barely contain one small apartment. Paul followed the direction of her glance, and said:

"Have you ever thought, Madame, what days passed together in a hut like that might be for two persons who loved one another to distraction? They would be alone in the world, truly alone, face to face! And, if such a thing were possible, ought not one be ready to give up everything in order to realize it, so rare, unseizable, and short-lived is happiness? Do we find it in our everyday life? What more depressing than to rise up without any ardent hope, to go through the same duties dispassionately, to drink in moderation, to eat with discretion, and to sleep tranquilly like a mere animal?"

She kept, all the time, staring at the little house; and her heart swelled up, as if she were going to burst into tears; for, in one flash of thought, she divined intoxicating joys, of whose existence she had no conception till that moment.

Indeed, she was thinking how sweet it would be for two to be together in this tiny abode hidden under the trees, facing that plaything of a lake, that jewel of a lake, true mirror of love! One might feel happy with nobody near, without a neighbor, without one sound of life, alone with a lover, who would pass his hours kneeling at the feet of the adored one, looking up at her, while her gaze wandered toward the blue wave, and whispering tender words in her ear, while he kissed the tips of her fingers. They would live there, amid the silence, beneath the trees, at the bottom of that crater, which would hold all their passion, like the limpid, unfathomable water, in the embrace of its firm and regular inclosure, with no other horizon for their eyes save the round line of the mountain's sides, with no other horizon for their thoughts save the bliss of loving one another, with no other horizon for their desires save kisses lingering and endless.

Were there, then, people on the earth who could enjoy days like this? Yes, undoubtedly! And why not? Why had she not sooner known that such joys exist?

The girls announced that dinner was ready. It was six o'clock already. They roused up the Marquis and Gontran in order that they might squat in Turkish fashion a short distance off, with the plates glistening beside them in the grass. The two sisters kept waiting on them, and the heedless men did not gainsay them. They ate at their leisure, flinging the cast-off pieces and the bones of the chickens into the water. They had brought champagne with them; the sudden noise of the first cork jumping up produced a surprising effect on everyone, so unusual did it appear in this solitary spot.

The day was declining; the air became impregnated with a delicious coolness. As the evening stole on, a strange melancholy fell on the water that lay sleeping at the bottom of the crater. Just as the sun was about to disappear, the western sky burst out into flame, and the lake suddenly assumed the aspect of a basin of fire. Then, when the sun had gone to rest, the horizon becoming red like a brasier on the point of being extinguished, the lake looked like a basin of blood. And suddenly above the crest of mountain, the moon nearly at its full rose up all pale in the still, cloudless firmament. Then, as the shadows gradually spread over the earth, it ascended glittering and round above the crater which was round also. It looked as if it were going to let itself drop down into the chasm; and when it had risen far up into the sky, the lake had the aspect of a basin of silver. Then, on its surface, motionless all day long, trembling movements could now be seen sometimes slow and sometimes rapid. It seemed as if some spirits skimming just above the water were drawing across it invisible veils.

It was the big fish at the bottom, the venerable carp and the voracious pike, who had come up to enjoy themselves in the moonlight.

The Oriol girls had put back all the plates, dishes, and bottles into the hamper, which the coachman came to take away. They rose up to go.

As they were passing into the path under the trees, where rays of light fell, like a silver shower, through the leaves and glittered on the grass, Christiane, who was following the others with Paul in the rear, suddenly heard a panting voice saying close to her ear: "I love you!—I love you!—I love you!"

Her heart began to beat so wildly that she was near sinking to the ground, and felt as if she could not move her limbs. Still she walked on, like one distraught, ready to turn round, her arms hanging wide and her lips tightly drawn. He had by this time caught the edge of the little shawl which she had drawn over her shoulders, and was kissing it frantically. She continued walking with such tottering steps that she no longer could feel the soil beneath her feet.

And now she emerged from under the canopy of trees, and finding herself in the full glare of the moonlight, she got the better of her agitation with a desperate effort; but, before stepping into the landau and losing sight of the lake, she half turned round to throw a long kiss with both hands toward the water, which likewise embraced the man who was following her.

On the return journey, she remained inert both in soul and body, dizzy, cramped up, as if after a fall; and, the moment they reached the hotel, she quickly rushed up to her own apartment, where she locked herself in. Even when the door was bolted and the key turned in the lock, she pressed her hand on it again, so much did she feel herself pursued and desired. Then she remained trembling in the middle of the room, which was nearly quite dark and had an empty look. The wax-candle placed on the table cast on the walls the quivering shadows of the furniture and of the curtains. Christiane sank into an armchair. All her thoughts were rushing, leaping, flying away from her so that she found it impossible to seize them, to hold them, to link them together. She felt now ready to weep, without well knowing why, broken-hearted, wretched, abandoned, in this empty room, lost in existence, just as in a forest. Where was she going, what would she do?

Breathing with difficulty, she rose up, flung open the window and the shutters in front of it, and leaned on her elbows over the balcony. The air was refreshing. In the depths of the sky, wide and empty, too, the distant moon, solitary and sad, having ascended now into the blue heights of night, cast forth a hard, cold luster on the trees and on the mountains.

The entire country lay asleep. Only the light strain of Saint Landri's violin, which he played till a late hour every night, broke the deep silence of the valley with its melancholy music. Christiane scarcely heard it. It ceased, then began again — the shrill and dolorous cry of the thin fiddlestrings.

And that moon lost in a desert sky, that feeble sound lost in the silent night, filled her heart with such a sense of solitude that she burst into sobs. She trembled and quivered to the very marrow of her bones, shaken by anguish and by the shuddering sensations of people attacked by some formidable malady; for suddenly it dawned upon her mind that she, too, was all alone in existence.

She had never realized this until to-day, and now she felt it so vividly in the distress of her soul that she imagined she was going mad.

She had a father! a brother! a husband! She loved them still, and they loved her. And here she was all at once separated from them, she had become a stranger to them as if she scarcely knew them. The calm affection of her father, the friendly companionship of her brother, the cold tenderness of her husband, appeared to her nothing any longer, nothing any longer. Her husband! This, her husband, the rosy-cheeked man who was accustomed to say to her in a careless tone, "Are you going far, dear, this morning?" She belonged to him, to this man, body and soul, by the mere force of a contract. Was this possible? Ah! how lonely and lost she felt herself! She closed her eyes to look into her own mind, into the lowest depths of her thoughts.

And she could see, as she evoked them out of her inner consciousness the faces of all those who lived around her—her father, careless and tranquil, happy as long as nobody disturbed his repose; her brother, scoffing and sceptical; her husband moving about, his head full of figures, and with the announcement on his lips, "I have just done a fine stroke of business!" when he should have said, "I love you!"

Another man had murmured that word a little while ago, and it was still vibrating in her ear and in her heart. She could see him also, this other man, devouring her with his fixed look; and, if he had been near her at that moment, she would have flung herself into his arms!

CHAPTER VII.

Attainment

Christiane, who had not gone to sleep till a very late hour, awoke as soon as the sun cast a flood of red light into her room through the window which she had left wide open. She glanced at her watch — it was five o'clock — and remained lying on her back deliciously in the warmth of the bed. It seemed to her, so active and full of joy did her soul feel, that a happiness, a great happiness, had come to her during the night. What was it? She sought to find out what it was; she sought to find out what was this new source of happiness which had thus penetrated her with delight. All her sadness of the night before had vanished, melted away, during sleep.

So Paul Bretigny loved her! How different he appeared to her from the first day! In spite of all the efforts of her memory, she could not bring back her first impression of him; she could not even recall to her mind the man introduced to her by her brother. He whom she knew to-day had retained nothing of the other, neither the face nor the bearing — nothing — for his first image had passed, little by little, day by day, through all the slow modifications which take place in the soul with regard to a being who from a mere acquaintance has come to be a familiar friend and a beloved object. You take possession of him hour by hour without suspecting it; possession of his movements, of his attitudes, of his physical and moral characteristics. He enters into you, into your eyes and your heart, by his voice, by all his gestures, by what he says and by what he thinks. You absorb him; you comprehend him; you divine him in all the meanings of his smiles and of his words; it seems at last that he belongs entirely to you, so much do you love, unconsciously still, all that is his and all that comes from him.

Then, too, it is impossible to remember what this being was like — to your indifferent eyes — when first he presented himself to your gaze. So then Paul Bretigny loved her! Christiane experienced from this discovery neither fear nor anguish, but a profound tenderness, an immense joy, new and exquisite, of being loved — of knowing that she was loved.

She was, however, a little disturbed as to the attitude that he would assume toward her and that she should preserve toward him. But, as it was a matter of delicacy for her conscience even to think of these things, she ceased to think about them, trusting to her own tact and ingenuity to direct the course of events.

She descended at the usual hour, and found Paul smoking a cigarette before the door of the hotel. He bowed respectfully to her:

"Good day, Madame. You feel well this morning?"

"Very well, Monsieur. I slept very soundly."

And she put out her hand to him, fearing lest he might hold it in his too long. But he scarcely pressed it; and they began quietly chatting as if they had forgotten one another.

And the day passed off without anything being done by him to recall his ardent avowal of the night before. He remained, on the days that followed, quite as discreet and calm; and she placed confidence in him. He realized, she thought, that he would wound her by becoming bolder; and she hoped, she firmly believed, that they might be able to stop at this delightful halting-place of tenderness, where they could love, while looking into the depths of one another's eyes, without remorse, inasmuch as they would be free from defilement. Nevertheless, she was careful never to wander out with him alone.

Now, one evening, the Saturday of the same week in which they had visited the lake of Tazenat, as they were returning to the hotel about ten o'clock,—the Marquis, Christiane, and Paul,—for they had left Gontran playing *écarté* with Aubrey and Riquier and Doctor Honorat in the great hall of the Casino, Bretigny exclaimed, as he watched the moon shining through the branches:

"How nice it would be to go and see the ruins of Tournoel on a night like this!"

At this thought alone, Christiane was filled with emotion, the moon and ruins having on her the same influence which they have on the souls of all women.

She pressed the Marquis's hands. "Oh! father dear, would you mind going there?"

He hesitated, being exceedingly anxious to go to bed.

She insisted: "Just think a moment, how beautiful Tournoel is even by day! You said yourself that you had never seen a ruin so picturesque, with that great tower above the château. What must it be at night!"

At last he consented: "Well, then, let us go! But we'll only look at it for five minutes, and then come back immediately. For my part, I want to be in bed at eleven o'clock."

"Yes, we will come back immediately. It takes only twenty minutes to get there."

They set out all three, Christiane leaning on her father's arm, and Paul walking by her side.

He spoke of his travels in Switzerland, in Italy, in Sicily. He told what his impressions were in the presence of certain phenomena, his enthusiasm on seeing the summit of Monte Rosa, when the sun, rising on the horizon of this row of icy peaks, this congealed world of eternal snows, cast on each of those lofty mountain-tops a dazzling white radiance, and illumined them, like the pale beacon-lights that must shine down upon the kingdoms of the dead. Then he spoke of his emotion on the edge of the monstrous crater of Etna, when he felt himself, an imperceptible mite, many meters above the cloud line, having nothing any longer around him save the sea and the sky, the blue sea beneath, the blue sky above, and leaning over this dreadful chasm of the earth, whose breath stifled him. He enlarged the objects which he described in order to excite the young woman; and, as she listened, she panted with visions she conjured up, by a flight of imagination, of those wonderful things that he had seen.

Suddenly, at a turn of the road, they discovered Tournoel. The ancient château, standing on a mountain peak, overlooked by its high and narrow tower, letting in the light through its chinks, and dismantled by time and by the wars of bygone days, traced, upon a sky of phantoms, its huge silhouette of a fantastic manor-house.

They stopped, all three surprised. The Marquis said, at length: "Indeed, it is impressive — like a dream of Gustave Doré realized. Let us sit down for five minutes."

And he sat down on the sloping grass.

But Christiane, wild with enthusiasm, exclaimed: "Oh! father, let us go on farther! It is so beautiful! so beautiful! Let us walk to the foot, I beg of you!"

This time the Marquis refused: "No, my darling, I have walked enough; I can't go any farther. If you want to see it more closely, go on there with M. Bretigny. I will wait here for you."

Paul asked: "Will you come, Madame?"

She hesitated, seized by two apprehensions, that of finding herself alone with him, and that of wounding an honest man by having the appearance of suspecting him.

The Marquis repeated: "Go on! Go on! I will wait for you."

Then she took it for granted that her father would remain within reach of their voices, and she said resolutely: "Let us go on, Monsieur."

But scarcely had she walked on for some minutes when she felt herself possessed by a poignant emotion, by a vague, mysterious fear—fear of the ruin, fear of the night, fear of this man. Suddenly she felt her legs trembling under her, just as she felt the other night by the lake of Tazenat; they refused to bear her any further, bent under her, appeared to be sinking into the soil, where her feet remained fixed when she strove to raise them.

A large chestnut-tree, planted close to the path they had been pursuing, sheltered one side of a meadow. Christiane, out of breath just as if she had been running, let herself sink against the trunk. And she stammered: "I shall remain here—we can see very well."

Paul sat down beside her. She heard his heart beating with great emotional throbs. He said, after a brief silence: "Do you believe that we have had a previous life?"

She murmured, without having well understood his question: "I don't know. I have never thought on it."

He went on: "But I believe it—at moments—or rather I feel it. As being is composed of a soul and a body, which seem distinct, but are, without doubt, only one whole of the same nature, it must reappear when the elements which have originally formed it find themselves together for the second time. It is not the same individual assuredly, but it is the same man who comes back when a body like the previous form finds itself inhabited by a soul like that which animated him formerly. Well, I, to-night, feel sure, Madame, that I lived in that château, that I possessed it, that I fought there, that I defended it. I recognized it—it was mine, I am certain of it!

And I am also certain that I loved there a woman who resembled you, and who, like you, bore the name of Christiane. I am so certain of it that I seem to see you still calling me from the top of that tower.

"Search your memory! recall it to your mind! There is a wood at the back, which descends into a deep valley. We have often walked there. You had light robes in the summer evenings, and I wore heavy armor, which clanked beneath the trees. You do not recollect? Look back, then, Christiane! Why, your name is as familiar to me as those we hear in childhood! Were we to inspect carefully all the stones of this fortress, we should find it there carved by my hand in days of yore! I declare to you that I recognize my dwelling-place, my country, just as I recognized you, you, the first time I saw you!"

He spoke in an exalted tone of conviction, poetically intoxicated by contact with this woman, and by the night, by the moon, and by the ruin.

He abruptly flung himself on his knees before Christiane, and, in a trembling voice said: "Let me adore you still since I have found you again! Here have I been searching for you a long time!"

She wanted to rise and to go away, to join her father, but she had not the strength; she had not the courage, held back, paralyzed by a burning desire to listen to him still, to hear those ravishing words entering her heart. She felt herself carried away in a dream, in the dream always hoped for, so sweet, so poetic, full of rays of moonlight and lays of love.

He had seized her hands, and was kissing the ends of her finger-nails, murmuring:

"Christiane — Christiane — take me — kill me! I love you, Christiane!"

She felt him quivering, shuddering at her feet. And now he kissed her knees, while his chest heaved with sobs. She was afraid that he was going mad, and started up to make her escape. But he had risen more quickly, and seizing her in his arms he pressed his mouth against hers.

Then, without a cry, without revolt, without resistance, she let herself sink back on the grass, as if this caress, by breaking her will, had crushed her physical power to struggle. And he possessed her with as much ease as if he were culling a ripe fruit.

But scarcely had he loosened his clasp when she rose up distracted, and rushed away shuddering and icy-cold all of a sudden, like one who had just fallen into the water. He overtook her with a few strides, and caught her by the arm, whispering: "Christiane, Christiane! Be on your guard with your father!"

She walked on without answering, without turning round, going straight before her with stiff, jerky steps. He followed her now without venturing to speak to her.

As soon as the Marquis saw them, he rose up: "Hurry," said he; "I was beginning to get cold. These things are very fine to look at, but bad for one undergoing thermal treatment!"

Christiane pressed herself close to her father's side, as if to appeal to him for protection and take refuge in his tenderness.

As soon as she had re-entered her apartment, she undressed herself in a few seconds and buried herself in her bed, hiding her head under the clothes; then she wept. She wept with her face pressed against the pillow for a long, long time, inert, annihilated. She did not think, she did not suffer, she did not regret. She wept without thinking, without reflecting, without knowing why. She wept instinctively as one sings when one feels gay. Then, when her tears were exhausted, overwhelmed, paralyzed with sobbing, she fell asleep from fatigue and lassitude.

She was awakened by light taps at the door of her room, which looked out on the drawing-room. It was broad daylight, as it was nine o'clock.

"Come in," she cried.

And her husband presented himself, joyous, animated, wearing a traveling-cap and carrying by his side his little money-bag, which he was never without while on a journey.

He exclaimed: "What? You were sleeping still, my dear! And I had to awaken you. There you are! I arrived without announcing myself. I hope you are going on well. It is superb weather in Paris."

And having taken off his cap, he advanced to embrace her. She drew herself away toward the wall, seized by a wild fear, by a nervous dread of this little man, with his smug, rosy countenance, who had stretched out his lips toward her.

Then, abruptly, she offered him her forehead, while she closed her eyes. He planted there a chaste kiss, and asked: "Will you allow me to wash in your dressing-room? As no one attended on me to-day, my room was not prepared."

She stammered: "Why, certainly."

And he disappeared through a door at the end of the bed.

She heard him moving about, splashing, snorting; then he cried: "What news here? For my part, I have splendid news. The analysis of the water has given unexpected results. We can cure at least three times more patients than they can at Royat. It is superb!"

She was sitting in the bed, suffocating, her brain overwrought by this unforeseen return, which hurt her like a physical pain and gripped her like a pang of remorse. He reappeared, self-satisfied, spreading around him a strong odor of verbena. Then he sat down familiarly at the foot of the bed, and asked:

"And the paralytic? How is he going on? Is he beginning to walk? It is not possible that he is not cured with what we found in the water!"

She had forgotten all about it for several days, and she faltered: "Why, I — I believe he is beginning to walk better. Besides, I have not seen him this week. I — I am a little unwell."

He looked at her with interest, and returned: "It is true, you are a little pale. All the same, it becomes you very well. You look charming thus — quite charming."

And he drew nearer, and bending toward her was about to pass one arm into the bed under her waist.

But she made such a backward movement of terror that he remained stupefied, with his hands extended and his mouth held toward her. Then he asked: "What's the matter with you nowadays? One cannot touch you any longer. I assure you I do not intend to hurt you."

And he pressed close to her eagerly, with a glow of sudden desire in his eyes. Then she stammered:

"No—let me be—let me be! The fact is, I believe—I believe I am pregnant!"

She had said this, maddened by the mental agony she was enduring, without thinking about her words, to avoid his touch, just as she would have said: "I have leprosy, or the plague."

He grew pale in his turn, moved by a profound joy; and he merely murmured: "Already!" He yearned now to embrace her a long time, softly, tenderly, as a happy and grateful father. Then, he was seized with uneasiness.

"Is it possible?—What?—Are you sure?—So soon?"

She replied: "Yes—it is possible!"

Then he jumped about the room, and rubbing his hands, exclaimed: "Christi! Christi! What a happy day!"

There was another tap at the door. Andermatt opened it, and a chambermaid said to him: "Doctor Latonne would like to speak to Monsieur immediately."

"All right. Bring him into our drawing-room. I am going there."

He hurried away to the adjoining apartment. The doctor presently appeared. His face had a solemn look, and his manner was starched and cold. He bowed, touched the hand which the banker, a little surprised, held toward him, took a seat, and explained in the tone of a second in an affair of honor:

"A very disagreeable matter has arisen with reference to me, my dear Monsieur, and, in order to explain my conduct, I must give you an account of it. When you did me the honor to call me in to see Madame Andermatt, I hastened to come at the appointed hour; now it has transpired that, a few minutes before me, my brother-physician, the medical inspector, who, no doubt, inspires more confidence in the lady, had been sent for, owing to the attentions of the Marquis de Ravenel.

"The result of this is that, having been the second to see her I create the impression of having taken by a trick from Doctor Bonnefille a patient who already belonged to him — I create the impression of having committed an indelicate act, one unbecoming and unjustifiable from one member of the profession toward another. Now it is necessary for us to carry, Monsieur, into the exercise of our art certain precautions and unusual tact in order to avoid every collision which might lead to grave consequences. Doctor Bonnefille, having been apprised of my visit here, believing me capable of this want of delicacy, appearances being in fact against me, has spoken about me in such terms that, were it not for his age, I would have found myself compelled to demand an explanation from him. There remains for me only one thing to do, in order to exculpate myself in his eyes, and in the eyes of the entire medical body of the country, and that is to cease, to my great regret, to give my professional attentions to your wife, and to make the entire truth about this matter known, begging of you in the meantime to accept my excuses."

Andermatt replied with embarrassment:

"I understand perfectly well, doctor, the difficult situation in which you find yourself. The fault is not mine or my wife's, but that of my father-in-law, who called in M. Bonnefille without giving us notice. Could I not go to look for your brother-doctor, and tell him?—"

Doctor Latonne interrupted him: "It is useless, my dear Monsieur. There is here a question of dignity and professional honor, which I am bound to respect before everything, and, in spite of my lively regrets—"

Andermatt, in his turn, interrupted him. The rich man, the man who pays, who buys a prescription for five, ten, twenty, or forty francs, as he does a box of matches for three sous, to whom everything should belong by the power of his purse, and who only appreciates beings and objects in virtue of an assimilation of their value with that of money, of a relation, rapid and direct, established between coined metal and everything else in the world, was irritated at the presumption of this vendor of remedies on paper. He said in a stiff tone:

"Be it so, doctor. Let us stop where we are. But I trust for your own sake that this step may not have a damaging influence on your career. We shall see, indeed, which of us two shall have the most to suffer from your decision."

The physician, offended, rose up and bowing with the utmost politeness, said: "I have no doubt, Monsieur, it is I who will suffer. That which I have done to-day is very painful to me from every point of view. But I never hesitate between my interests and my conscience."

And he went out. As he emerged through the open door, he knocked against the Marquis, who was entering, with a letter in his hand. And M. de Ravenel exclaimed, as soon as he was alone with his son-in-law: "Look here, my dear fellow! this is a very troublesome thing, which has happened me through your fault. Doctor Bonnefille, hurt by the circumstance that you sent for his brother-physician to see Christiane, has written me a note couched in very dry language informing me that I cannot count any longer on his professional services."

Thereupon, Andermatt got quite annoyed. He walked up and down, excited himself by talking, gesticulated, full of harmless and noisy anger, that kind of anger which is never taken seriously. He went on arguing in a loud voice. Whose fault was it, after all? That of the Marquis alone, who had called in that pack-ass Bonnefille without giving any notice of the fact to him, though he had, thanks to his Paris physician, been informed as to the relative value of the three charlatans at Enval! And then what business had the Marquis to consult a doctor, behind the back of the husband, the husband who was the only judge, the only person responsible for his wife's health? In short, it was the same thing day after day with everything! People did nothing but stupid things around him, nothing but stupid things! He repeated it incessantly; but he was only crying in the desert, nobody understood, nobody put faith in his experience, until it was too late.

And he said, "My physician," "My experience," with the authoritative tone of a man who has possession of unique things. In his mouth the possessive pronouns had the sonorous ring of metals. And when he pronounced the words "My wife," one felt very clearly that the Marquis had no longer any rights with regard to his daughter since Andermatt had married her, to marry and to buy having the same meaning in the latter's mind.

Gontran came in, at the most lively stage of the discussion, and seated himself in an armchair with a smile of gaiety on his lips. He said nothing, but listened, exceedingly amused. When the banker stopped talking, having fairly exhausted his breath, his brother-in-law raised his hand, exclaiming:

"I request permission to speak. Here are both of you without physicians, isn't that so? Well, I propose my candidate, Doctor Honorat, the only one who has formed an exact and unshaken opinion on the water of Enval. He makes people drink it, but he would not drink it himself for all the world. Do you wish me to go and look for him? I will take the negotiations on myself."

It was the only thing to do, and they begged of Gontran to send for him immediately. The Marquis, filled with anxiety at the idea of a change of regimen and of nursing wanted to know immediately the opinion of this new physician; and Andermatt desired no less eagerly to consult him on Christiane's behalf.

She heard their voices through the door without listening to their words or understanding what they were talking about. As soon as her husband had left her, she had risen from the bed, as if from a dangerous spot, and hurriedly dressed herself, without the assistance of the chambermaid, shaken by all these occurrences.

The world appeared to her to have changed around her, her former life seemed to have vanished since last night, and people themselves looked quite different.

The voice of Andermatt was raised once more: "Hallo, my dear Bretigny, how are you getting on?"

He no longer used the word "Monsieur." Another voice could be heard saying in reply: "Why, quite well, my dear Andermatt. You only arrived, I suppose, this morning?"

Christiane, who was in the act of raising her hair over her temples, stopped with a choking sensation, her arms in the air. Through the partition, she fancied she could see them grasping one another's hands. She sat down, no longer able to hold herself erect; and her hair, rolling down, fell over her shoulders.

It was Paul who was speaking now, and she shivered from head to foot at every word that came from his mouth. Each word, whose meaning she did not seize, fell and sounded on her heart like a hammer striking a bell.

Suddenly, she articulated in almost a loud tone: "But I love him!—I love him!" as though she were affirming something new and surprising, which saved her, which consoled her, which proclaimed her innocence before the tribunal of her conscience. A sudden energy made her rise up; in one second, her resolution was taken. And she proceeded to rearrange her hair, murmuring: "I have a lover, that is all. I have a lover." Then, in order to fortify herself still more, in order to get rid of all mental distress, she determined there and then, with a burning faith, to love him to distraction, to give up to him her life, her happiness, to sacrifice everything for him, in accordance with the moral exaltation of hearts conquered but still scrupulous, that believe themselves to be purified by devotedness and sincerity.

And, from behind the wall which separated them, she threw out kisses to him. It was over; she abandoned herself to him, without reserve, as she might have offered herself to a god. The child already coquettish and artful, but still timid, still trembling, had suddenly died within her; and the woman was born, ready for passion, the woman resolute, tenacious, announced only up to this time by the energy hidden in her blue eye, which gave an air of courage and almost of bravado to her dainty white face.

She heard the door opening, and did not turn round, divining that it was her husband, without seeing him, as though a new sense, almost an instinct, had just been generated in her also.

He asked: "Will you be soon ready? We are all going presently to the paralytic's bath, to see if he is really getting better."

She replied calmly: "Yes, my dear Will, in five minutes."

But Gontran, returning to the drawing-room, was calling back Andermatt.

"Just imagine," said he; "I met that idiot Honorat in the park, and he, too, refuses to attend you for fear of the others. He talks of professional etiquette, deference, usages. One would imagine that he creates the impression of—in short, he is a fool, like his two brother-physicians. Certainly, I thought he was less of an ape than that."

The Marquis remained overwhelmed. The idea of taking the waters without a physician, of bathing for five minutes longer than necessary, of drinking one glass less than he ought, tortured him with apprehension, for he believed all the doses, the hours, and the phases of the treatment, to be regulated by a law of nature, which had made provision for invalids in causing the flow of those mineral springs, all whose mysterious secrets the doctors knew, like priests inspired and learned.

He exclaimed: "So then we must die here—we may perish like dogs, without any of these gentlemen putting himself about!"

And rage took possession of him, the rage egotistical and unreasoning of a man whose health is endangered.

"Have they any right to do this, since they pay for a license like grocers, these blackguards? We ought to have the power of forcing them to attend people, as trains can be forced to take all passengers. I am going to write to the newspapers to draw attention to the matter."

He walked about, in a state of excitement; and he went on, turning toward his son:

"Listen! It will be necessary to send for one to Royat or Clermont. We can't remain in this state."

Gontran replied, laughing: "But those of Clermont and of Royat are not well acquainted with the liquid of Enval, which has not the same special action as their water on the digestive system and on the circulatory apparatus. And then, be sure, they won't come any more than the others in order to avoid the appearance of taking the bread out of their brother-doctors' mouths."

The Marquis, quite scared, faltered: "But what, then, is to become of us?"

Andermatt snatched up his hat, saying: "Let me settle it, and I'll answer for it that we'll have the entire three of them this evening — you understand clearly, the — entire — three — at our knees. Let us go now and see the paralytic."

He cried: "Are you ready, Christiane?"

She appeared at the door, very pale, with a look of determination. Having embraced her father and her brother, she turned toward Paul, and extended her hand toward him. He took it, with downcast eyes, quivering with emotion. As the Marquis, Andermatt, and Gontran had gone on before, chatting, and without minding them, she said, in a firm voice, fixing on the young man a tender and decided glance:

"I belong to you, body and soul. Do with me henceforth what you please." Then she walked on, without giving him an opportunity of replying.

As they drew near the Oriols' spring, they perceived, like an enormous mushroom, the hat of Père Clovis, who was sleeping beneath the rays of the sun, in the warm water at the bottom of the hole. He now spent the entire morning there, having got accustomed to this boiling water which made him, he said, more lively than a yearling.

Andermatt woke him up: "Well, my fine fellow, you are going on better?"

When he had recognized his patron, the old fellow made a grimace of satisfaction: "Yes, yes, I am going on — I am going on as well as you please."

"Are you beginning to walk?"

"Like a rabbit, Mochieu — like a rabbit. I will dance a boree with my sweetheart on the first Sunday of the month."

Andermatt felt his heart beating; he repeated: "It is true, then, that you are walking?"

Père Clovis ceased jesting. "Oh! not very much, not very much. No matter — I'm getting on — I'm getting on!"

Then the banker wanted to see at once how the vagabond walked. He kept rushing about the hole, got agitated, gave orders, as if he were going to float again a ship that had foundered.

"Look here, Gontran! you take the right arm. You, Bretigny, the left arm. I am going to keep up his back. Come on! together! — one — two — three! My dear father-in-law, draw the leg toward you — no, the other, the one that's in the water. Quick, pray! I can't hold out longer. There we are — one, two — there! — ouf!"

They had put the old trickster sitting on the ground; and he allowed them to do it with a jeering look, without in any way assisting their efforts.

Then they raised him up again, and set him on his legs, giving him his crutches, which he used like walking-sticks; and he began to step out, bent double, dragging his feet after him, whining and blowing. He advanced in the fashion of a slug, and left behind him a long trail of water on the white dust of the road.

Andermatt, in a state of enthusiasm, clapped his hands, crying out as people do at theaters when applauding the actors: "Bravo, bravo, admirable, bravo!!!"

Then, as the old fellow seemed exhausted, he rushed forward to hold him up, seized him in his arms, although his clothes were streaming, and he kept repeating:

"Enough, don't fatigue yourself! We are going to put you back into your bath."

And Père Clovis was plunged once more into his hole by the four men who caught him by his four limbs and carried him carefully like a fragile and precious object.

Then, the paralytic observed in a tone of conviction: "It is good water, all the same, good water that hasn't an equal. It is worth a treasure, water like that!"

Andermatt turned round suddenly toward his father-in-law: "Don't keep breakfast waiting for me. I am going to the Oriols', and I don't know when I'll be free. It is necessary not to let these things drag!"

And he set forth in a hurry, almost running, and twirling his stick about like a man bewitched.

The others sat down under the willows, at the side of the road, opposite Père Clovis's hole.

Christiane, at Paul's side, saw in front of her the high knoll from which she had seen the rock blown up.

She had been up there that day, scarcely a month ago. She had been sitting on that russet grass. One month! Only one month! She recalled the most trifling details, the tricolored parasols, the scullions, the slightest things said by each of them! And the dog, the poor dog crushed by the explosion! And that big youth, then a stranger to her, who had rushed forward at one word uttered by her lips in order to save the animal. To-day, he was her lover! her lover! So then she had a lover! She was his mistress—his mistress! She repeated this word in the recesses of her consciousness—his mistress! What a strange word! This man, sitting by her side, whose hand she saw tearing up one by one blades of grass, close to her dress, which he was seeking to touch, this man was now bound to her flesh and to his heart, by that mysterious chain, buried in secrecy and mystery, which nature has stretched between woman and man.

With that voice of thought, that mute voice which seems to speak so loudly in the silence of troubled souls, she incessantly repeated to herself: "I am his mistress! his mistress!" How strange, how unforeseen, a thing this was!

"Do I love him?" She cast a rapid glance at him. Their eyes met, and she felt herself so much caressed by the passionate look with which he covered her, that she trembled from head to foot. She felt a longing now, a wild, irresistible longing, to take that hand which was toying with the grass, and to press it very tightly in order to convey to him all that may be said by a clasp. She let her own hand slip along her dress down to the grass, then laid it there motionless, with the fingers spread wide. Then she saw the other come softly toward it like an amorous animal seeking his companion. It came nearer and nearer; and their little fingers touched. They grazed one another at the ends gently, barely, lost one another and found one another again, like lips meeting. But this imperceptible caress, this slight contact entered into her being so violently that she felt herself growing faint as if he were once more straining her between his arms.

And she suddenly understood how a woman can belong to some man, how she no longer is anything under the love that possesses her, how that other being takes her body and soul, flesh, thought, will, blood, nerves,—all, all, all that is in her,—just as a huge bird of prey with large wings swoops down on a wren.

The Marquis and Gontran talked about the future station, themselves won over by Will's enthusiasm. And they spoke of the banker's merits, the clearness of his mind, the sureness of his judgment, the certainty of his system of speculation, the boldness of his operations, and the regularity of his character. Father-in-law and brother-in-law, in the face of this probable success, of which they felt certain, were in agreement, and congratulated one another on this alliance.

Christiane and Paul did not seem to hear, so much occupied were they with each other.

The Marquis said to his daughter: "Hey! darling, you may perhaps one day be one of the richest women in France, and people will talk of you as they do about the Rothschilds. Will has truly a remarkable, very remarkable—a great intelligence."

But a morose and whimsical jealousy entered all at once into Paul's heart.

"Let me alone now," said he, "I know it, the intelligence of all those engaged in stirring up business. They have only one thing in their heads—money! All the thoughts that we bestow on beautiful things, all the actions that we waste on our caprices, all the hours which we fling away for our distractions, all the strength that we squander on our pleasures, all the ardor and the power which love, divine love, takes from us, they employ in seeking for gold, in thinking of gold, in amassing gold!

The man of intelligence lives for all the great disinterested tendernesses, the arts, love, science, travels, books; and, if he seeks money, it is because this facilitates the true pleasures of intellect and even the happiness of the heart! But they — they have nothing in their minds or their hearts but this ignoble taste for traffic! They resemble men of worth, these skimmers of life, just as much as the picture-dealer resembles the painter, as the publisher resembles the writer, as the theatrical manager resembles the dramatic poet."

He suddenly became silent, realizing that he had allowed himself to be carried away, and in a calmer voice he went on: "I don't say that of Andermatt, whom I consider a charming man. I like him a great deal, because he is a hundred times superior to all the others."

Christiane had withdrawn her hand. Paul once more stopped talking. Gontran began to laugh; and, in his malicious voice, with which he ventured to say everything, in his hours of mocking and raillery:

"In any case, my dear fellow, these men have one rare merit: that is, to marry our sisters and to have rich daughters, who become our wives."

The Marquis, annoyed, rose up: "Oh! Gontran, you are perfectly revolting."

Paul thereupon turned toward Christiane, and murmured: "Would they know how to die for one woman, or even to give her all their fortune — all — without keeping anything?"

This meant so clearly: "All I have is yours, including my life," that she was touched, and she adopted this device in order to take his hands in hers:

"Rise, and lift me up. I am benumbed from not moving."

He stood erect, seized her by the wrists, and drawing her up placed her standing on the edge of the road close to his side. She saw his mouth articulating the words, "I love you," and she quickly turned aside, to avoid saying to him in reply three words which rose to her lips in spite of her, in a burst of passion which was drawing her toward him.

They returned to the hotel. The hour for the bath was passed. They awaited the breakfast-bell. It rang, but Andermatt did not make his appearance. After taking another turn in the park, they resolved to sit down to table. The meal, although a long one, was finished before the return of the banker. They went back to sit down under the trees. And the hours stole by, one after another; the sun glided over the leaves, bending toward the mountains; the day was ebbing toward its close; and yet Will did not present himself.

All at once, they saw him. He was walking quickly, his hat in his hand, wiping his forehead, his necktie on one side, his waistcoat half open, as if after a journey, after a struggle, after a terrible and prolonged effort.

As soon as he beheld his father-in-law, he exclaimed: "Victory! 'tis done! But what a day, my friends! Ah! the old fox, what trouble he gave me!"

And immediately he explained the steps he had taken and the obstacles he had met with.

Père Oriol had, at first, shown himself so unreasonable that Andermatt was breaking off the negotiations and going away. Then the peasant called him back. The old man pretended that he would not sell his lands but would assign them to the Company with the right to resume possession of them in case of ill success. In case of success, he demanded half the profits.

The banker had to demonstrate to him, with figures on paper and tracings to indicate the different bits of land, that the fields all together would not be worth more than forty-five thousand francs at the present hour, while the expenses of the Company would mount up at one swoop to a million.

But the Auvergnat replied that he expected to benefit by the enormously increased value that would be given to his property by the erection of the establishment and hotels, and to draw his interest in the undertaking in accordance with the acquired value and not the previous value.

Andermatt had then to represent to him that the risks should be proportionate with the possible gains, and to terrify him with the apprehension of the loss.

They accordingly arrived at this agreement: Père Oriol was to assign to the Company all the grounds stretching as far as the banks of the stream, that is to say, all those in which it appeared possible to find mineral water, and in addition the top of the knoll, in order to erect there a casino and a hotel, and some vine-plots on the slope which should be divided into lots and offered to the leading physicians of Paris.

The peasant, in return for this apportionment valued at two hundred and fifty thousand francs, that is, at about four times its value, would participate to the extent of a quarter in the profits of the Company. As there was very much more land, which he did not part with, round the future establishment, he was sure, in case of success, to realize a fortune by selling on reasonable terms these grounds, which would constitute, he said, the dowry of his daughters.

As soon as these conditions had been arrived at, Will had to carry the father and the son with him to the notary's office in order to have a promise of sale drawn up defeasible in the event of their not finding the necessary water. And the drawing up of the agreement, the discussion of every point, the indefinite repetition of the same arguments, the eternal commencement over again of the same contentions, had lasted all the afternoon.

At last the matter was concluded. The banker had got his station. But he repeated, devoured by a regret: "It will be necessary for me to confine myself to the water without thinking of the questions about the land. He has been cunning, the old ape."

Then he added: "Bah! I'll buy up the old Company, and it is on that I may speculate! No matter — it is necessary that I should start this evening again for Paris."

The Marquis, astounded, cried out: "What? This evening?"

"Why, yes, my dear father-in-law, in order to get the definitive instrument prepared, while M. Aubry-Pasteur will be making excavations. It is necessary also that I should make arrangements to commence the works in a fortnight. I haven't an hour to lose. With regard to this, I must inform you that you are to constitute a portion of my board of directors in which I will need a strong majority. I give you ten shares. To you, Gontran, also I give ten shares."

Gontran began to laugh: "Many thanks, my dear fellow. I sell them back to you. That makes five thousand francs you owe me."

But Andermatt no longer felt in a mood for joking, when dealing with business of so much importance. He resumed dryly: "If you are not serious, I will address myself to another person."

Gontran ceased laughing: "No, no, my good friend, you know that I have cleared off everything with you."

The banker turned toward Paul: "My dear Monsieur, will you render me a friendly service, that is, to accept also ten shares with the rank of director?"

Paul, with a bow, replied: "You will permit me, Monsieur, not to accept this graceful offer, but to put a hundred thousand francs into the undertaking, which I consider a superb one. So then it is I who have to ask for a favor from you."

William, ravished, seized his hands. This confidence had conquered him. Besides he always experienced an irresistible desire to embrace persons who brought him money for his enterprises.

But Christiane crimsoned to her temples, pained, bruised. It seemed to her that she had just been bought and sold. If he had not loved her, would Paul have offered these hundred thousand francs to her husband? No, undoubtedly! He should not, at least, have entered into this transaction in her presence.

The dinner-bell rang. They re-entered the hotel. As soon as they were seated at table, Madame Paille, the mother, asked Andermatt:

"So you are going to set up another establishment?"

The news had already gone through the entire district, was known to everyone, it put the bathers into a state of commotion.

William replied: "Good heavens, yes! The existing one is too defective!"

And turning round to M. Aubry-Pasteur: "You will excuse me, dear Monsieur, for speaking to you at dinner of a step which I wished to take with regard to you; but I am starting again for Paris, and time presses on me terribly. Will you consent to direct the work of excavation, in order to find a volume of superior water?"

The engineer, feeling flattered, accepted the office. In five minutes everything had been discussed and settled with the clearness and precision which Andermatt imported into all matters of business. Then they talked about the paralytic. He had been seen crossing the park in the afternoon with only one walking-stick, although that morning he had used two. The banker kept repeating: "This is a miracle, a real miracle. His cure proceeds with giant strides!"

Paul, to please the husband, rejoined: "It is Père Clovis himself who walks with giant strides."

A laugh of approval ran round the table. Every eye was fixed on Will; every mouth complimented him.

The waiters of the restaurant made it their business to serve him the first, with a respectful deference, which disappeared from their faces as soon as they passed the dishes to the next guest.

One of them presented to him a card on a plate. He took it up, and read it, half aloud:

"Doctor Latonne of Paris would be happy if M. Andermatt would be kind enough to give him an interview of a few seconds before his departure."

"Tell him in reply that I have no time, but that I will be back in eight or ten days."

At the same moment, a box of flowers sent by Doctor Honorat was presented to Christiane.

Gontran laughed: "Père Bonnefille is a bad third," said he.

The dinner was nearly over. Andermatt was informed that his landau was waiting for him. He went up to look for his little bag; and when he came down again he saw half the village gathered in front of the door.

Petrus Martel came to grasp his hand, with the familiarity of a strolling actor, and murmured in his ear: "I shall have a proposal to make to you—something stunning—with reference to your undertaking."

Suddenly, Doctor Bonnefille appeared, hurrying in his usual fashion. He passed quite close to Will, and bowing very low to him as he would do to the Marquis, he said to him:

"A pleasant journey, Baron."

"That settles it!" murmured Gontran.

Andermatt, triumphant, swelling with joy and pride, pressed the hands extended toward him, thanked them, and kept repeating: *"Au revoir!"*

He was nearly forgetting to embrace his wife, so much was he thinking about other things. This indifference was a relief to her, and, when she saw the landau moving away on the darkening road, as the horses broke into a quick trot, it seemed to her that she had nothing more to fear from anyone for the rest of her life.

She spent the whole evening seated in front of the hotel, between her father and Paul Bretigny, Gontran having gone to the Casino, where he went every evening.

She did not want either to walk or to talk, and remained motionless, her hands clasped over her knees, her eyes lost in the darkness, languid and weak, a little restless and yet happy, scarcely thinking, not even dreaming, now and then struggling against a vague remorse, which she thrust away from her, always repeating to herself, "I love him! I love him!"

She went up to her apartment at an early hour, in order to be alone and to think. Seated in the depths of an armchair and covered with a dressing-gown which floated around her, she gazed at the stars through the window, which was left open; and in the frame of that window she evoked every minute the image of him who had conquered her. She saw him, kind, gentle, and powerful — so strong and so yielding in her presence. This man had taken herself to himself,— she felt it,— taken her forever. She was alone no longer; they were two, whose two hearts would henceforth form but one heart, whose two souls would henceforth form but one soul. Where was he? She knew not; but she knew full well that he was dreaming of her, just as she was thinking of him. At each throb of her heart she believed she heard another throb answering somewhere. She felt a desire wandering round her and fanning her cheek like a bird's wing. She felt it entering through that open window, this desire coming from him, this burning desire, which entreated her in the silence of the night.

How good it was, how sweet and refreshing to be loved! What joy to think of some one, with a longing in your eyes to weep, to weep with tenderness, and a longing also to open your arms, even without seeing him, in order to invite him to come, to stretch one's arms toward the image that presents itself, toward that kiss which your lover casts unceasingly from far or near, in the fever of his waiting.

And she stretched toward the stars her two white arms in the sleeves of her dressing-gown. Suddenly she uttered a cry. A great black shadow, striding over her balcony, had sprung up into her window.

She sprang wildly to her feet! It was he! And, without even reflecting that somebody might see them, she threw herself upon his breast.

AFTER THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY FERDINAND BAC.

"She sprang wildly to her feet. It was he!"

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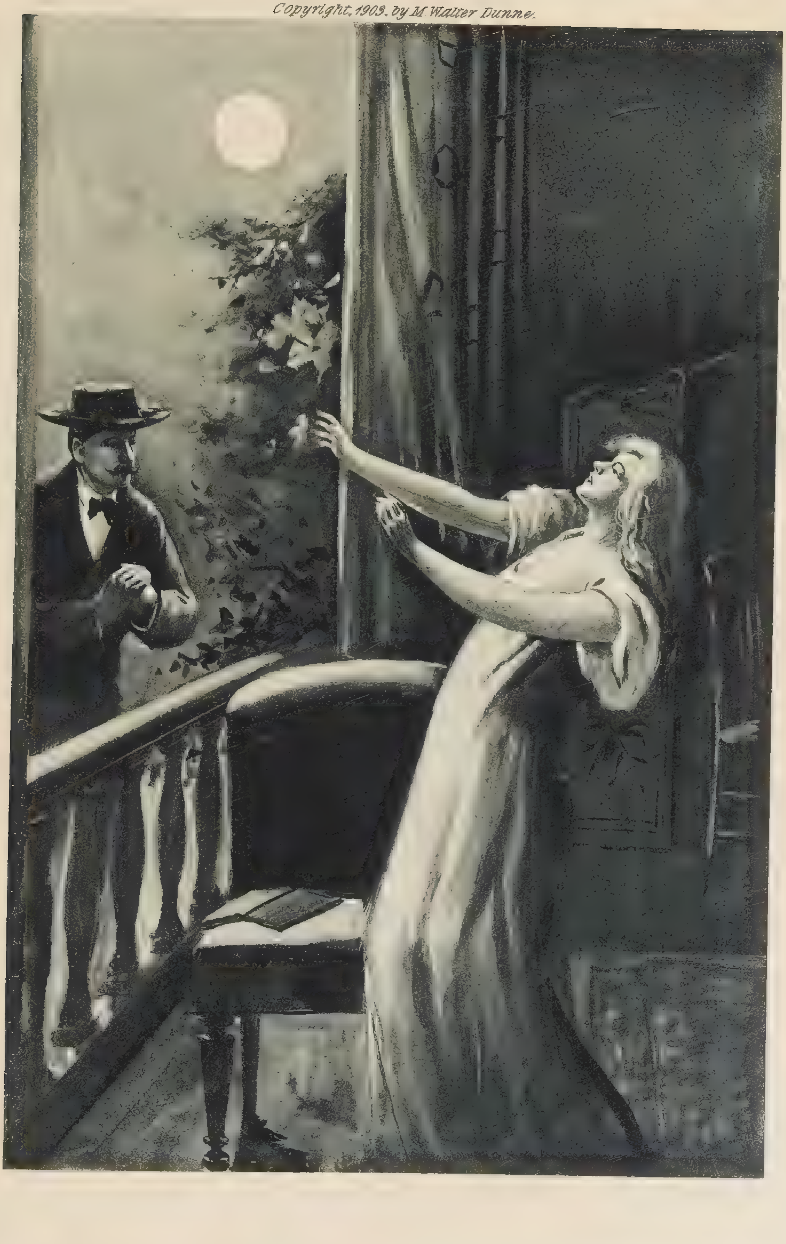


CHAPTER VIII.

ORGANIZATION

THE absence of Andermatt was prolonged. M. Aubry-Pasteur got the soil dug up. He found, in addition, four springs, which supplied the new Company with more than twice as much water as they required. The entire district, driven crazy by these searches, by these discoveries, by the great news which circulated everywhere, by the prospects of a brilliant future, became agitated and enthusiastic, talked of nothing else, and thought of nothing else. The Marquis and Gontran themselves spent their days hanging round the workmen, who were boring through the veins of granite; and they listened with increasing interest to the explanations and the lectures of the engineer on the geological character of Auvergne. And Paul and Christiane loved one another freely, tranquilly, in absolute security, without anyone suspecting anything, without anyone thinking even of spying on them, for the attention, the curiosity, and the zeal of all around them were absorbed in the future station.

Christiane acted like a young girl under the intoxication of a first love. The first draught, the first kiss, had burned, had stunned her. She had swallowed the second very quickly, and had found it better, and now again and again she raised the intoxicating cup to her lips.

Since the night when Paul had broken into her apartment, she no longer took any heed of what was happening in the world. For her, time, events, beings, no longer had any existence; there was nothing else in life save one man, he whom she loved. Henceforth, her eyes saw only him, her mind thought only of him, her hopes were fixed on him alone. She lived, went from place to place, ate, dressed herself, seemed to listen and to reply, without consciousness or thought about what she was doing. No disquietude haunted her, for no misfortune could have fallen on her. She had become insensible to everything. No physical pain could have taken hold of her flesh, as love alone could, so as to make her shudder. No moral suffering could have taken hold of her soul, paralyzed by happiness. Moreover, he, loving her with the self-abandonment which he displayed in all his attachments, excited the young woman's tenderness to distraction.

Often, toward evening, when he knew that the Marquis and Gontran had gone to the springs, he would say, "Come and look at our heaven." He called a cluster of pine-trees growing on the hillside above even the gorges their heaven. They ascended to this spot through a little wood, along a steep path, to climb which took away Christiane's breath. As their time was limited, they proceeded rapidly, and, in order that she might not be too much fatigued, he put his arm round her waist and lifted her up. Placing one hand on his shoulder, she let herself be borne along; and, from time to time, she would throw herself on his neck and place her mouth against his lips. As they mounted higher, the air became keener; and, when they reached the cluster of pine-trees, the odor of the balsam refreshed them like a breath of the sea.

They sat down under the shadowy trees, she on a grassy knoll, and he lower down, at her feet. The wind in the stems sang that sweet chant of the pine-trees which is like a wail of sorrow; and the immense Limagne, with its unseen backgrounds steeped in fog, gave them a sensation exactly like that of the ocean. Yes, the sea was there in front of them, down below. They could have no doubt of it, for they felt its breath fanning their faces.

He talked to her in the coaxing tone that one uses toward a child.

"Give me your fingers and let me eat them—they are my bonbons, mine!"

He put them one after the other into his mouth, and seemed to be tasting them with gluttonous delight.

"Oh! how nice they are!—especially the little one. I have never eaten anything better than the little one."

Then he threw himself on his knees, placed his elbows on Christiane's lap, and murmured:

"'Liane,' are you looking at me?" He called her Liane because she entwined herself around him in order to embrace him the more closely, as a plant clings around a tree. "Look at me. I am going to enter your soul."

And they exchanged that immovable, persistent glance, which seems truly to make two beings mingle with one another!

"We can only love thoroughly by thus possessing one another," he said. "All the other things of love are but foul pleasures."

And, face to face, their breaths blending into one, they sought to see one another's images in the depths of their eyes.

He murmured: "I love you, Liane. I see your adored heart."

She replied: "I, too, Paul, see your heart!"

And, indeed, they did see one another even to the depths of their hearts and souls, for there was no longer in their hearts and souls anything but a mad transport of love for one another.

He said: "Liane, your eye is like the sky. It is blue, with so many reflections, with so much clearness. It seems to me that I see swallows passing through them—these, no doubt, must be your thoughts."

And when they had thus contemplated one another for a long, long time, they drew nearer still to one another, and embraced softly with little jerks, gazing once more into each other's eyes between each kiss. Sometimes he would take her in his arms, and carry her, while he ran along the stream, which glided toward the gorges of Enval, before dashing itself into them. It was a narrow glen, where meadows and woods alternated. Paul rushed over the grass, and now and then he would raise her up high with his powerful wrists, and exclaim: "Liane, let us fly away." And with this yearning to fly away, love, their impassioned love, filled them, harassing, incessant, sorrowful. And everything around them whetted this desire of their souls, the light atmosphere — a bird's atmosphere, he said — and the vast blue horizon, in which they both would fain have taken wing, holding each other by the hand, so as to disappear above the boundless plain when the night spread its shadows across it. They would have flown thus across the hazy evening sky, never to return. Where would they have gone? They knew not; but what a glorious dream! When he had got out of breath from running while carrying her in this way, he placed her sitting on a rock in order to kneel down before her; and, kissing her ankles, he adored her, murmuring infantile and tender words.

Had they been lovers in a city, their passion, no doubt, would have been different, more prudent, more sensual, less ethereal, and less romantic. But there, in that green country, whose horizon widened the flights of the soul, alone, without anything to distract them, to attenuate their instinct of awakened love, they had suddenly plunged into a passionately poetic attachment made up of ecstasy and frenzy. The surrounding scenery, the balmy air, the woods, the sweet perfume of the fields, played for them all day and all night the music of their love — music which excited them even to madness, as the sound of tambourines and of shrill flutes drives to acts of savage unreason the dervish who whirls round with fixed intent.

One evening, as they were returning to the hotel for dinner, the Marquis said to them, suddenly:

"Andermatt is coming back in four days. Matters are all arranged. We are to leave the day after his return. We have been here a long time. We must not prolong mineral water seasons too much."

They were as much taken by surprise as if they had heard the end of the world announced, and during the meal neither of them uttered a word, so much were they thinking with astonishment of what was about to happen. So then they would, in a few days, be separated and would no longer be able to see one another freely. That appeared so impossible and so extraordinary to them that they could not realize it.

Andermatt did, in fact, come back at the end of the week. He had telegraphed in order that two landaus might be sent on to him to meet the first train.

Christiane, who had not slept, tormented as she was by a strange and new emotion, a sort of fear of her husband, a fear mingled with anger, with inexplicable contempt, and a desire to set him at defiance, had risen at daybreak, and was awaiting him. He appeared in the first carriage, accompanied by three gentlemen well attired but modest in demeanor. The second landau contained four others, who seemed persons of rank somewhat inferior to the first. The Marquis and Gontran were astonished. The latter asked: "Who are these people?"

Andermatt replied: "My shareholders. We are going to establish the Company this very day, and to nominate the board of directors immediately."

He embraced his wife without speaking to her, and almost without looking at her, so preoccupied was he; and, turning toward the seven gentlemen, who were standing behind him, silent and respectful:

"Go and have breakfast, and take a walk," said he. "We'll meet again here at twelve o'clock."

They went off without saying anything, like soldiers obeying orders, and mounting the steps of the hotel one after another, they went in. Gontran, who had been watching them as they disappeared from view, asked in a very serious tone:

"Where did you find them, these 'supers' of yours?"

The banker smiled: "They are very well-to-do men, moneyed men, capitalists."

And, after a pause, he added, with a more significant smile: "They busy themselves about my affairs."

Then he repaired to the notary's office to read over again the documents, of which he had sent the originals, all prepared, some days before. There he found Doctor Latonne, with whom, moreover, he had been in correspondence, and they chatted for a long time in low tones, in a corner of the office, while the clerks' pens ran along the paper, with the buzzing noise of insects.

The meeting to establish the Company was fixed for two o'clock. The notary's study had been fitted up as if for a concert. Two rows of chairs were placed for the shareholders in front of the table, where Maître Alain was to take his seat beside his principal clerk. Maître Alain had put on his official garment in consideration of the importance of the business in hand. He was a very small man, a stuttering ball of white flesh.

Andermatt entered just as it struck two, accompanied by the Marquis, his brother-in-law, and Bretigny, and followed by the seven gentlemen, whom Gontran described as "supers." He had the air of a general. Père Oriol also made his appearance with Colosse by his side. He seemed uneasy, distrustful, as people always are when about to sign a document. The last to arrive was Doctor Latonne. He had made his peace with Andermatt by a complete submission preceded by excuses skillfully turned, and followed by an offer of his services without any reserve or restrictions.

Thereupon, the banker, feeling that he had Latonne in his power, promised him the post he longed for, of medical inspector of the new establishment.

When everyone was in the room, a profound silence reigned. The notary addressed the meeting: "Gentlemen, take your seats." He gave utterance to a few words more, which nobody could hear in the confusion caused by the moving about of the chairs.

Andermatt lifted up a chair, and placed it in front of his army, in order to keep his eye on all his supporters; then, when he was seated, he said:

"Messieurs, I need not enter into any explanations with you as to the motive that brings us together. We are going, first of all, to establish the new Company in which you have consented to become shareholders. It is my duty, however, to apprise you of a few details, which have caused us a little embarrassment. I have found it necessary, before even entering on the undertaking at all, to assure myself that we could obtain the required authority for the creation of a new establishment of public utility. This assurance I have got. What remains to be done with respect to this, I will make it my business to do. I have the Minister's promise. But another point demands my attention. We are going, Messieurs, to enter on a struggle with the old Company of the Enval waters. We shall come forth victorious in this struggle, victorious and enriched, you may be certain; but, just as in the days of old, a war cry was necessary for the combatants, we, combatants in the modern battle, require a name for our station, a name sonorous, attractive, well fashioned for advertising purposes, which strikes the ear like the note of a clarion, and penetrates the ear like a flash of lightning. Now, Messieurs, we are in Enval, and we can not unbaptize this district. One resource only is left to us. To designate our establishment, our establishment alone, by a new appellation.

"Here is what I propose to you: If our bathhouse is to be at the foot of the knoll, of which M. Oriol, here present, is the proprietor, our future Casino will be erected on the summit of this same knoll. We may, therefore, say that this knoll, this mountain—for it is a mountain, a little mountain—furnishes the site of our establishment, inasmuch as we have the foot and the top of it. Is it not, therefore, natural to call our baths the Baths of Mont Oriol, and to attach to this station, which will become one of the most important in the entire world, the name of the original proprietor? Render to Cæsar what belongs to Cæsar.

"And observe, Messieurs, that this is an excellent vocable. People will talk of 'the Mont Oriol' as they talk of 'the Mont Doré.' It fixes itself on the eye and in the ear; we can see it well; we can hear it well; it abides in us—Mont Oriol!—Mont Oriol!—The baths of Mont Oriol!"

And Andermatt made this word ring, flung it out like a ball, listening to the echo of it. He went on, repeating imaginary dialogues: "'You are going to the baths of Mont Oriol?'

"'Yes, Madame. People say they are perfect, these waters of Mont Oriol.'

"'Excellent, indeed. Besides, Mont Oriol is a delightful district.'"

And he smiled, assumed the air of people chatting to one another, altered his voice to indicate when the lady was speaking, saluted with the hand when representing the gentleman.

Then he resumed, in his natural voice: "Has anyone an objection to offer?"

The shareholders answered in chorus: "No, none."

All the "supers" applauded. Père Oriol, moved, flattered, conquered, overcome by the deep-rooted pride of an upstart peasant, began to smile while he twisted his hat about between his hands, and he made a sign of assent with his head in spite of him, a movement which revealed his satisfaction, and which Andermatt observed without pretending to see it. Colosse remained impassive, but was quite as much satisfied as his father.

Then Andermatt said to the notary: "Kindly read the instrument whereby the Company is incorporated, Maître Alain."

And he resumed his seat. The notary said to his clerk: "Go on, Marinet."

Marinet, a wretched consumptive creature, coughed, and with the intonations of a preacher, and an attempt at declamation, began to enumerate the statutes relating to the incorporation of an anonymous Company, called the Company of the Thermal Establishment of Mont Oriol at Enval with a capital of two millions.

Père Oriol interrupted him: "A moment, a moment," said he. And he drew forth from his pocket a few sheets of greasy paper, which during the past eight days had passed through the hands of all the notaries and all the men of business of the department. It was a copy of the statutes which his son and himself by this time were beginning to know by heart. Then, he slowly fixed his spectacles on his nose, raised up his head, looked out for the exact point where he could easily distinguish the letters, and said in a tone of command:

"Go on from that place, Marinet."

Colosse, having got close to his chair, also kept his eye on the paper along with his father.

And Marinet commenced over again. Then old Oriol, bewildered by the double task of listening and reading at the same time, tortured by the apprehension of a word being changed, beset also by the desire to see whether Andermatt was making some sign to the notary, did not allow a single line to be got through without stopping ten times the clerk whose elocutionary efforts he interrupted.

He kept repeating: "What did you say? What did you say there? I didn't understand—not so quick!"

Then turning aside a little toward his son: "What place is he at, Coloche?"

Coloche, more self-controlled, replied: "It's all right, father—let him go on—it's all right."

The peasant was still distrustful. With the end of his crooked finger he went on tracing on the paper the words as they were read out, muttering them between his lips; but he could not fix his attention at the same time on both matters. When he listened, he did not read, and he did not hear when he was reading. And he puffed as if he had been climbing a mountain; he perspired as if he had been digging his vine-fields under a midday sun, and from time to time, he asked for a few minutes' rest to wipe his forehead and to take breath, like a man fighting a duel.

Andermatt, losing patience, stamped with his foot on the ground. Gontran, having noticed on a table the "Moniteur du Puy-de-Dome," had taken it up and was running his eye over it, and Paul, astride on his chair, with downcast eyes and an anxious heart, was reflecting that this little man, rosy and corpulent, sitting in front of him, was going to carry off, next day, the woman whom he loved with all his soul, Christiane, his Christiane, his fair Christiane, who was his, his entirely, nothing to anyone save him. And he asked himself whether he was not going to carry her off this very evening.

The seven gentlemen remained serious and tranquil.

At the end of an hour, it was finished. The deed was signed. The notary made out certificates for the payments on the shares. On being appealed to, the cashier, M. Abraham Levy, declared that he had received the necessary deposits. Then the company, from that moment legally constituted, was announced to be gathered together in general assembly, all the shareholders being in attendance, for the appointment of a board of directors and the election of their chairman.

All the votes with the exception of two, were recorded in favor of Andermatt's election to the post of chairman. The two dissentients — the old peasant and his son — had nominated Oriol. Bretigny was appointed commissioner of superintendence. Then, the Board, consisting of MM. Andermatt, the Marquis and the Count de Ravenel, Bretigny, the Oriols, father and son, Doctor Latonne, Abraham Levy, and Simon Zidler, begged of the remaining shareholders to withdraw, as well as the notary and his clerk, in order that they, as the governing body, might determine on the first resolutions, and settle the most important points.

Andermatt rose up again: "Messieurs, we are entering on the vital question, that of success, which we must win at any cost.

"It is with mineral waters as with everything. It is necessary to get them talked about a great deal, and continually, so that invalids may drink them.

"The great modern question, Messieurs, is that of advertising. It is the god of commerce and of contemporary industry. Without advertising there is no security. The art of advertising, moreover, is difficult, complicated, and demands a considerable amount of tact. The first persons who resorted to this new expedient employed it rudely, attracting attention by noise, by beating the big drum, and letting off cannon-shots. Mangin, Messieurs, was only a forerunner.

To-day, clamor is regarded with suspicion, showy placards cause a smile, the crying out of names in the streets awakens distrust rather than curiosity. And yet it is necessary to attract public attention, and after having fixed it, it is necessary to produce conviction. The art, therefore, consists in discovering the means, the only means which can succeed, having in our possession something that we desire to sell. We, Messieurs, for our part, desire to sell water. It is by the physicians that we are to get the better of the invalids.

"The most celebrated physicians, Messieurs, are men like ourselves—who have weaknesses like us. I do not mean to convey that we can corrupt them. The reputation of the illustrious masters, whose assistance we require, places them above all suspicion of venality. But what man is there that cannot be won over by going properly to work with him? There are also women who cannot be purchased. These it is necessary to fascinate.

"Here, then, Messieurs, is the proposition which I am going to make to you, after having discussed it at great length with Doctor Latonne:

"We have, in the first place, classified in three leading groups the maladies submitted for our treatment. These are, first, rheumatism in all its forms, skin-disease, arthritis, gout, and so forth; secondly, affections of the stomach, of the intestines and of the liver; thirdly, all the disorders arising from disturbed circulation, for it is indisputable that our acidulated baths have an admirable effect on the circulation.

"Moreover, Messieurs, the marvelous cure of Père Clovis promises us miracles. Accordingly, when we have to deal with maladies which these waters are calculated to cure, we are about to make to the principal physicians who attend patients for such diseases the following proposition: 'Messieurs,' we shall say to them, 'come and see, come and see with your own eyes; follow your patients; we offer you hospitality. The country is magnificent; you require a rest after your severe labors during the winter—come! And come not to our houses, worthy professors, but to your own, for we offer you a cottage, which will belong to you, if you choose, on exceptional conditions.'"

Andermatt took breath, and went on in a more subdued tone:

"Here is how I have tried to work out this idea. We have selected six lots of land of a thousand meters each. On each of these six lots, the Bernese 'Chalets Mobiles' Company undertakes to fix one of their model buildings. We shall place gratuitously these dwellings, as elegant as they are comfortable, at the disposal of our physicians. If they are pleased with them, they need only buy the houses from the Bernese Company; as for the grounds, we shall assign them to the physicians, who are to pay us back—in invalids. Therefore, Messieurs, we obtain these multiplied advantages of covering our property with charming villas which cost us nothing, of attracting thither the leading physicians of the world and their legion of clients, and above all of convincing the eminent doctors who will very rapidly become proprietors in the district of the efficacy of our waters. As to all the negotiations necessary to bring about these results I take them upon myself, Messieurs; and I will do so, not as a speculator but as a man of the world."

Père Oriol interrupted him. The parsimony which he shared with the peasantry of Auvergne made him object to this gratuitous assignment of land.

Andermatt was inspired with a burst of eloquence. He compared the agriculturist on a large scale who casts his seed in handfuls into the teeming soil with the rapacious peasant who counts the grains and never gets more than half a harvest.

Then, as Oriol, annoyed by this language, persisted in his objections, the banker made his board divide, and shut the old man's mouth with six votes against two.

He next opened a large morocco portfolio and took out of it plans of the new establishment—the hotel and the Casino—as well as the estimates, and the most economical methods of procuring materials, which had been all prepared by the contractors, so that they might be approved of and signed before the end of the meeting. The works should be commenced by the beginning of the week after next.

The two Oriols alone wanted to investigate and discuss matters. But Andermatt, becoming irritated, said to them: "Did I ask you for money? No! Then give me peace! And, if you are not satisfied, we'll take another division on it."

Thereupon, they signed along with the remaining members of the Board; and the meeting terminated.

All the inhabitants of the place were waiting to see them going out, so intense was the excitement. The people bowed respectfully to them. As the two peasants were about to return home, Andermatt said to them:

"Do not forget that we are all dining together at the hotel. And bring your girls; I have brought them presents from Paris."

They were to meet at seven o'clock in the drawing-room of the Hotel Splendid.

It was a magnificent dinner to which the banker had invited the principal bathers and the authorities of the village. Christiane, who was the hostess, had the curé at her right, and the mayor at her left.

The conversation was all about the future establishment and the prospects of the district. The two Oriol girls had found under their napkins two caskets containing two bracelets of pearls and emeralds, and wild with delight, they talked as they had never done before, with Gontran sitting between them. The elder girl herself laughed with all her heart at the jokes of the young man, who became animated, while he talked to them, and in his own mind formed about them those masculine judgments, those judgments daring and secret, which are generated in the flesh and in the mind, at the sight of every pretty woman.

Paul did not eat, and did not open his lips. It seemed to him that his life was going to end tonight. Suddenly he remembered that just a month had glided away, day by day, since the open-air dinner by the lake of Tazenat. He had in his soul that vague sense of pain caused rather by presentiments than by grief, known to lovers alone, that sense of pain which makes the heart so heavy, the nerves so vibrating that the slightest noise makes us pant, and the mind so wretchedly sad that everything we hear assumes a somber hue so as to correspond with the fixed idea.

As soon as they had quitted the table, he went to join Christiane in the drawing-room.

"I must see you this evening," he said, "presently, immediately, since I no longer can tell when we may be able to meet. Are you aware that it is just a month to-day?"

She replied: "I know it."

He went on: "Listen! I am going to wait for you on the road to La Roche Pradière, in front of the village, close to the chestnut-trees. Nobody will notice your absence at the time. Come quickly in order to bid me adieu, since to-morrow we part."

She murmured: "I'll be there in a quarter of an hour."

And he went out to avoid being in the midst of this crowd which exasperated him.

He took the path through the vineyards which they had followed one day — the day when they had gazed together at the Limagne for the first time. And soon he was on the highroad. He was alone, and he felt alone, alone in the world. The immense, invisible plain increased still more this sense of isolation. He stopped in the very spot where they had seated themselves on the occasion when he recited Baudelaire's lines on Beauty. How far away it was already! And, hour by hour, he retraced in his memory all that had since taken place. Never had he been so happy, never! Never had he loved so distractedly, and at the same time so chastely, so devotedly. And he recalled that evening by the "gour" of Tazenat, only a month from to-day — the cool wood mellowed with a pale luster, the little lake of silver, and the big fishes that skimmed along its surface; and their return, when he saw her walking in front of him with light and shadow falling on her in turn, the moon's rays playing on her hair, on her shoulders, and on her arms through the leaves of the trees. These were the sweetest hours he had tasted in his life. He turned round to ascertain whether she might not have arrived. He did not see her, but he perceived the moon, which appeared at the horizon. The same moon which had risen for his first declaration of love had risen now for his first adieu.

A shiver ran through his body, an icy shiver. The autumn had come — the autumn that precedes the winter. He had not till now felt this first touch of cold, which pierced his frame suddenly like a menace of misfortune.

The white road, full of dust, stretched in front of him, like a river between its banks. A form at that moment rose up at the turn of the road. He recognized her at once; and he waited for her without flinching, trembling with the mysterious bliss of feeling her drawing near, of seeing her coming toward him, for him.

She walked with lingering steps, without venturing to call out to him, uneasy at not finding him yet, for he remained concealed under a tree, and disturbed by the deep silence, by the clear solitude of the earth and sky. And, before her, her shadow advanced, black and gigantic, some distance away from her, appearing to carry toward him something of her, before herself.

Christiane stopped, and the shadow remained also motionless, lying down, fallen on the road.

Paul quickly took a few steps forward as far as the place where the form of the head rounded itself on her path. Then, as if he wanted to lose no portion of her, he sank on his knees, and prostrating himself, placed his mouth on the edge of the dark silhouette. Just as a thirsty dog drinks crawling on his belly in a spring he began to kiss the dust passionately, following the outlines of the beloved shadow. In this way, he moved toward her on his hands and knees, covering with caresses the lines of her body, as if to gather up with his lips the obscure image, dear because it was hers, that lay spread along the ground.

She, surprised, a little frightened even, waited till he was at her feet before she had the courage to speak to him; then, when he had lifted up his head, still remaining on his knees, but now straining her with both arms, she asked:

"What is the matter with you, to-night?"

He replied: "Liane, I am going to lose you."

She thrust all her fingers into the thick hair of her lover, and, bending down, held back his forehead in order to kiss his eyes.

"Why lose me?" said she, smiling, full of confidence.

"Because we are going to separate to-morrow."

"We separate? For a very short time, darling."

"One never knows. We shall not again find days like those that we passed here."

"We shall have others which will be as lovely."

She raised him up, drew him under the tree, where he had been awaiting her, made him sit down close to her, but lower down, so that she might have her hand constantly in his hair; and she talked in a serious strain, like a thoughtful, ardent, and resolute woman, who loves, who has already provided against everything, who instinctively knows what must be done, who has made up her mind for everything.

"Listen, my darling. I am very free at Paris. William never bothers himself about me. His business concerns are enough for him. Therefore, as you are not married, I will go to see you. I will go to see you every day, sometimes in the morning before breakfast, sometimes in the evening, on account of the servants, who might chatter if I went out at the same hour. We can meet as often as here, even more than here, for we shall not have to fear inquisitive persons."

But he repeated with his head on her knees, and her waist tightly clasped: "Liane, Liane, I am going to lose you!"

She became impatient at this unreasonable grief, at this childish grief in this vigorous frame, while she, so fragile compared with him, was yet so sure of herself, so sure that nothing could part them.

He murmured: "If you wished it, Liane, we might fly off together, we might go far away, into a beautiful country full of flowers where we could love one another. Say, do you wish that we should go off together this evening—are you willing?"

But she shrugged her shoulders, a little nervous, a little dissatisfied, at his not having listened to her, for this was not the time for dreams and soft puerilities. It was necessary now for them to show themselves energetic and prudent, and to find out a way in which they could continue to love one another without rousing suspicion.

She said in reply: "Listen, darling! we must thoroughly understand our position, and commit no mistakes or imprudences. First of all, are you sure about your servants? The thing to be most feared is lest some one should give information or write an anonymous letter to my husband. Of his own accord, he will guess nothing. I know William well."

This name, twice repeated, all at once had an irritating effect on Paul's nerves. He said: "Oh! don't speak to me about him this evening."

She was astonished: "Why? It is quite necessary, however. Oh! I assure you that he has scarcely anything to do with me."

She had divined his thoughts. An obscure jealousy, as yet unconscious, was awakened within him. And suddenly, sinking on his knees and seizing her hands:

"Listen, Liane! What terms are you on with him?"

"Why—why—very good!"

"Yes, I know. But listen—understand me clearly. He is—he is your husband, in fact—and—and—you don't know how much I have been brooding over this for some time past—how much it torments, tortures me. You know what I mean. Tell me!"

She hesitated a few seconds, then in a flash she realized his entire meaning, and with an outburst of indignant candor:

"Oh! my darling!—can you—can you think such a thing? Oh! I am yours—do you understand?—yours alone—since I love you—oh! Paul!"

He let his head sink on the young woman's lap, and in a very soft voices, said:

"But!—after all, Liane, you know he is your husband. What will you do? Have you thought of that? Tell me! What will you do this evening or to-morrow? For you cannot—always, always say 'No' to him!"

She murmured, speaking also in a very low tone: "I have pretended to be *enceinte*, and—and that is enough for him. Oh! there is scarcely anything between us— Come! say no more about this, my darling. You don't know how this wounds me. Trust me, since I love you!"

He did not move, breathing hard and kissing her dress, while she caressed his face with her amorous, dainty fingers.

But, all of a sudden, she said: "We must go back, for they will notice that we are both absent."

They embraced each other, clinging for a long time to one another in a clasp that might well have crushed their bones.

Then she rushed away so as to be back first and to enter the hotel quickly, while he watched her departing and vanishing from his sight, oppressed with sadness, as if all his happiness and all his hopes had taken flight along with her.

CHAPTER IX.

The Spa Again

The station of Enval could hardly be recognized on the first of July of the following year. On the summit of the knoll, standing between the two outlets of the valley, rose a building in the Moorish style of architecture, bearing on its front the word "Casino" in letters of gold.

A little wood had been utilized for the purpose of creating a small park on the slope facing the Limagne. Lower down, among the vines, six chalets here and there showed their *façades* of polished wood. On the slope facing the south, an immense structure was visible at a distance to travelers, who perceived it on their way from Riom.

This was the Grand Hotel of Mont Oriol. And exactly below it, at the very foot of the hill, a square house, simpler and more spacious, surrounded by a garden, through which ran the rivulet which flowed down from the gorges, offered to invalids the miraculous cure promised by a pamphlet of Doctor Latonne.

On the *façade* could be read: "Thermal baths of Mont Oriol." Then, on the right wing, in smaller letters: "Hydropathy. — Stomach-washing. — Piscina with running water." And, on the left wing: "Medical institute of automatic gymnastics."

All this was white, with a fresh whiteness, shining and crude. Workmen were still occupied in completing it — house-painters, plumbers, and laborers employed in digging, although the establishment had already been a month open.

Its success, moreover, had since the start, surpassed the hopes of its founders. Three great physicians, three celebrities, Professor Mas-Roussel, Professor Cloche, and Professor Remusot, had taken the new station under their patronage, and consented to sojourn for some time in the villas of the Bernese "Châlets Mobiles" Company, placed at their disposal by the Board intrusted with the management of the waters.

Under their influence a crowd of invalids flocked to the place. The Grand Hotel of Mont Oriol was full.

Although the baths had commenced working since the first days of June, the official opening of the station had been postponed till the first of July, in order to attract a great number of people. The *fête* was to commence at three o'clock with the ceremony of blessing the springs; and in the evening, a magnificent performance, followed by fireworks and a ball, would bring together all the bathers of the place, as well as those of the adjoining stations, and the principal inhabitants of Clermont-Ferrand and Riom.

The Casino on the summit of the hill was hidden from view by the flags. Nothing could be seen any longer but blue, red, white, yellow, a kind of dense and palpitating cloud; while from the tops of the gigantic masts planted along the walks in the park, huge oriflammes curled themselves in the blue sky with serpentine windings.

M. Petrus Martel, who had been appointed conductor of this new Casino, seemed to think that under this cloud of flags he had become the all-powerful captain of some fantastic ship; and he gave orders to the white-aproned waiters with the resounding and terrible voice which admirals need in order to exercise command under fire. His vibrating words, borne on by the wind, were heard even in the village.

Andermatt, out of breath already, appeared on the terrace. Petrus Martel advanced to meet him and bowed to him in a lordly fashion.

"Everything is going on well?" inquired the banker.

"Everything is going on well, my dear President."

"If anyone wants me, I am to be found in the medical inspector's study. We have a meeting this morning."

And he went down the hill again. In front of the door of the thermal establishment, the overseer and the cashier, carried off also from the other Company, which had become the rival Company, but doomed without a possible contest, rushed forward to meet their master. The ex-jailer made a military salute. The other bent his head like a poor person receiving alms. Andermatt asked:

"Is the inspector here?"

The overseer replied: "Yes, Monsieur le President, all the gentlemen have arrived."

The banker passed through the vestibule, in the midst of bathers and respectful waiters, turned to the right, opened a door, and found in a spacious apartment of serious aspect, full of books and busts of men of science, all the members of the Board at present in Enval assembled: his father-in-law the Marquis, and his brother-in-law Gontran, the Oriols, father and son, who had almost been transformed into gentlemen wearing frock-coats of such length that —with their own tallness, they looked like advertisements for a mourning-warehouse — Paul Bretigny, and Doctor Latonne.

After some rapid hand-shaking, they took their seats, and Andermatt commenced to address them:

"It remains for us to regulate an important matter, the naming of the springs. On this subject I differ entirely in opinion from the inspector. The doctor proposes to give to our three principal springs the names of the three leaders of the medical profession who are here. Assuredly, there would in this be a flattery which might touch them and win them over to us still more. But be sure, Messieurs, that it would alienate from us forever those among their distinguished professional brethren who have not yet responded to our invitation, and whom we should convince, at the cost of our best efforts and of every sacrifice, of the sovereign efficacy of our waters. Yes, Messieurs, human nature is unchangeable; it is necessary to know it and to make use of it. Never would Professors Plantureau, De Larenard, and Pascalis, to refer only to these three specialists in affections of the stomach and intestines, send their patients to be cured by the water of the Mas-Roussel Spring, the

Cloche Spring, or the Remusot Spring. For these patients and the entire public would in that case be somewhat disposed to believe that it was by Professors Remusot, Cloche, and Mas-Roussel that our water and all its therapeutic properties had been discovered. There is no doubt, Messieurs, that the name of Gubler, with which the original spring at Chatel-Guyon was baptized, for a long time prejudiced against these waters, to-day in a prosperous condition, a section, at least, of the great physicians, who might have patronized it from the start.

"I accordingly propose to give quite simply the name of my wife to the spring first discovered and the names of the Mademoiselles Oriol to the other two. We shall thus have the Christiane, the Louise, and the Charlotte Springs. This suits very well; it is very nice. What do you say to it?"

His suggestion was adopted even by Doctor Latonne, who added: "We might then beg of MM. Mas-Roussel, Cloche, and Remusot to be godfathers and to offer their arms to the godmothers."

"Excellent, excellent," said Andermatt. "I am hurrying to meet them. And they will consent. I may answer for them—they will consent. Let us, therefore, reassemble at three o'clock in the church where the procession is to be formed."

And he went off at a running pace. The Marquis and Gontran followed him almost immediately. The Oriols, father and son, with tall hats on their heads, hastened to walk in their turn side by side, grave looking and all in black, on the white road; and Doctor Latonne said to Paul, who had only arrived the previous evening, to be present at the *fête:*

"I have detained you, Monsieur, in order to show you a thing from which I expect marvelous results. It is my medical institute of automatic gymnastics."

He took him by the arm, and led him in. But they had scarcely reached the vestibule when a waiter at the baths stopped the doctor:

"M. Riquier is waiting for his wash."

Doctor Latonne had, last year, spoken disparagingly of the stomach washings, extolled and practiced by Doctor Bonnefille, in the establishment of which he was inspector. But time had modified his opinion, and the Baraduc probe had become the great instrument of torture of the new inspector, who plunged it with an infantile delight into every gullet.

He inquired of Paul Bretigny: "Have you ever seen this little operation?"

The other replied: "No, never."

"Come on then, my dear fellow—it is very curious."

They entered the shower-bath room, where M. Riquier, the brick-colored man, who was this year trying the newly discovered springs, as he had tried, every summer, every fresh station, was waiting in a wooden armchair.

Like some executed criminal of olden times, he was squeezed and choked up in a kind of straight waistcoat of oilcloth, which was intended to preserve his clothes from stains and splashes; and he had the wretched, restless, and pained look of patients on whom a surgeon is about to operate.

As soon as the doctor appeared, the waiter took up a long tube, which had three divisions near the middle, and which had the appearance of a thin serpent with a double tail. Then the man fixed one of the ends to the extremity of a little cock communicating with the spring. The second was let fall into a glass receiver, into which would be presently discharged the liquids rejected by the patient's stomach; and the medical inspector, seizing with a steady hand the third arm of this conduit-pipe, drew it, with an air of amiability, toward M. Riquier's jaw, passed it into his mouth, and guiding it dexterously, slipped it into his throat, driving it in more and more with the thumb and index-finger, in a gracious and benevolent fashion, repeating:

"Very good! very good! very good! That will do, that will do; that will do; that will do exactly!"

M. Riquier, with staring eyes, purple cheeks, lips covered with foam, panted for breath, gasped as if he were suffocating, and had agonizing fits of coughing; and, clutching the arms of the chair, he made terrible efforts to get rid of that beastly india-rubber which was penetrating into his body.

When he had swallowed about a foot and a half of it, the doctor said: "We are at the bottom. Turn it on!"

The attendant thereupon turned on the cock, and soon the patient's stomach became visibly swollen, having been filled up gradually with the warm water of the spring.

"Cough," said the physician, "cough, in order to facilitate the descent."

In place of coughing, the poor man had a rattling in the throat, and shaken with convulsions, he looked as if his eyes were going to jump out of his head.

Then suddenly a light gurgling could be heard on the ground close to the armchair. The spout of the tube with the two passages had at last begun to work; and the stomach now emptied itself into this glass receiver where the doctor searched eagerly for the indications of catarrh and the recognizable traces of imperfect digestion.

"You are not to eat any more green peas," said he, "or salad. Oh! no salad! You cannot digest it at all. No more strawberries either! I have already repeated to you ten times, no strawberries!"

M. Riquier seemed raging with anger. He excited himself now without being able to utter a word on account of this tube, which stopped up his throat. But when, the washing having been finished, the doctor had delicately drawn out the probe from his interior, he exclaimed:

"Is it my fault if I am eating every day filth that ruins my health? Isn't it you that should watch the meals supplied by your hotel-keeper? I have come to your new cook-shop because they used to poison me at the old one with abominable food, and I am worse than ever in your big barrack of a Mont Oriol inn, upon my honor!"

The doctor had to appease him, and promised over and over again to have the invalids' food at the *table d'hôte* submitted beforehand to his inspection. Then, he took Paul Bretigny's arm again, and said as he led him away:

"Here are the extremely rational principles on which I have established my special treatment by the self-moving gymnastics, which we are going to inspect. You know my system of organometric medicine, don't you? I maintain that a great portion of our maladies entirely proceed from the excessive development of some one organ which encroaches on a neighboring organ, impedes its functions, and, in a little while, destroys the general harmony of the body, whence arise the most serious disturbances.

"Now, the exercise is, along with the shower-bath and the thermal treatment, one of the most powerful means of restoring the equilibrium and bringing back the encroaching parts to their normal proportions.

"But how are we to determine the man to make the exercise? There is not merely the act of walking, of mounting on horseback, of swimming or rowing — a considerable physical effort. There is also and above all a moral effort. It is the mind which determines, draws along, and sustains the body. The men of energy are men of movement. Now energy is in the soul and not in the muscles. The body obeys the vigorous will.

"It is not necessary to think, my dear friend, of giving courage to the cowardly or resolution to the weak. But we can do something else, we can do more — we can suppress mental energy, suppress moral effort and leave only physical subsisting. This moral effort, I replace with advantage by a foreign and purely mechanical force. Do you understand? No, not very well. Let us go in."

He opened a door leading into a large apartment, in which were ranged fantastic looking instruments, big armchairs with wooden legs, horses made of rough deal, articulated boards, and movable bars stretched in front of chairs fixed in the ground. And all these objects were connected with complicated machinery, which was set in motion by turning handles.

The doctor went on: "Look here. We have four principal kinds of exercise. These are walking, equitation, swimming, and rowing. Each of these exercises develops different members, acts in a special fashion. Now, we have them here — the entire four — produced by artificial means. All you have to do is to let yourself act, while thinking of nothing, and you can run, mount on horseback, swim, or row for an hour, without the mind taking any part — the slightest part in the world — in this entirely muscular work."

At that moment, M. Aubry-Pasteur entered, followed by a man whose tucked-up sleeves displayed the vigorous biceps on each arm. The engineer was as fat as ever. He was walking with his legs spread wide apart and his arms held out from his body, while he panted for breath.

The doctor said: "You will understand by looking on at it yourself."

And addressing his patient: "Well, my dear Monsieur, what are we going to do to-day? Walking or equitation?"

M. Aubry-Pasteur, who pressed Paul's hand, replied: "I would like a little walking seated; that fatigues me less."

M. Latonne continued: "We have, in fact, walking seated and walking erect. Walking erect, while more efficacious, is rather painful. I procure it by means of pedals on which you mount and which set your legs in motion while you maintain your equilibrium by clinging to rings fastened to the wall. But here is an example of walking while seated."

The engineer had fallen back into a rocking armchair, and he placed his legs in the wooden legs with movable joints attached to this seat. His thighs, calves, and ankles were strapped down in such a way that he was unable to make any voluntary movement; then, the man with the tucked-up sleeves, seizing the handle, turned it round with all his strength. The armchair, at first, swayed to and fro like a hammock; then, suddenly, the patient's legs went out, stretching forward and bending back, advancing and returning, with extreme speed.

"He is running," said the doctor, who then gave the order: "Quietly! Go at a walking pace."

The man, turning the handle more slowly, caused the fat engineer to do the sitting walk in a more moderate fashion, which ludicrously distorted all the movements of his body.

Two other patients next made their appearance, both of them enormous, and followed also by two attendants with naked arms.

They were hoisted upon wooden horses, which, set in motion, began immediately to jump along the room, shaking their riders in an abominable manner.

"Gallop!" cried the doctor. And the artificial animals, rushing like waves and capsizing like ships, fatigued the two patients so much that they began to scream out together in a panting and pitiful tone:

"Enough! enough! I can't stand it any longer! Enough!"

The physician said in a tone of command: "Stop!" He then added: "Take breath for a little while. You will go on again in five minutes."

Paul Bretigny, who was choking with suppressed laughter, drew attention to the fact that the riders were not warm, while the handle-turners were perspiring.

"If you inverted the rôles," said he, "would it not be better?"

The doctor gravely replied: "Oh! not at all, my dear friend. We must not confound exercise and fatigue. The movement of the man who is turning the wheel is injurious, while the movement of the walker or the rider is beneficial."

But Paul noticed a lady's saddle.

"Yes," said the physician; "the evening is reserved for the other sex. The men are no longer admitted after twelve o'clock. Come, then, and look at the dry swimming."

A system of movable little boards screwed together at their ends and at their centers, stretched out in lozenge-shape or closing into squares, like that children's game which carries along soldiers who are spurred on, permitted three swimmers to be garroted and mangled at the same time.

The doctor said: "I need not extol to you the benefits of dry swimming, which does not moisten the body except by perspiration, and consequently does not expose our imaginary bather to any danger of rheumatism."

But a waiter, with a card in his hand, came to look for the doctor.

"The Duc de Ramas, my dear friend. I must leave you. Excuse me."

Paul, left there alone, turned round. The two cavaliers were trotting afresh. M. Aubry-Pasteur was walking still; and the three natives of Auvergne, with their arms all but broken and their backs cracking with thus shaking the patients on whom they were operating, were quite out of breath. They looked as if they were grinding coffee.

When he had reached the open air, Bretigny saw Doctor Honorat watching, along with his wife, the preparations for the *fête*. They began to chat, gazing at the flags which crowned the hill with a kind of halo.

"Is it at the church the procession is to be formed?" the physician asked his wife.

"It is at the church."

"At three o'clock?"

"At three o'clock."

"The professors will be there?"

"Yes, they will accompany the lady-sponsors."

The next persons to stop were the ladies Paille. Then, came the Monecus, father and daughter. But as he was going to breakfast alone with his friend Gontran at the Casino Café, he slowly made his way up to it. Paul, who had arrived the night before, had not had an interview with his comrade for the past month; and he was longing to tell him many boulevard stories — stories about gay women and houses of pleasure.

They remained chattering away till half past two when Petrus Martel came to inform them that people were on their way to the church.

"Let us go and look for Christiane," said Gontran.

"Let us go," returned Paul.

They found her standing on the steps of the new hotel. She had the hollow cheeks and the swarthy complexion of pregnant women; and her figure indicated a near accouchement.

"I was waiting for you," she said. "William is gone on before us. He has so many things to do to-day."

She cast toward Paul Bretigny a glance full of tenderness, and took his arm. They went quietly on their way, avoiding the stones.

She kept repeating: "How heavy I am! How heavy I am! I am no longer able to walk. I am so much afraid of falling!"

He did not reply, and carefully held her up, without seeking to meet her eyes which she turned toward him incessantly.

In front of the church, a dense crowd was awaiting them.

Andermatt cried: "At last! at last! Come, make haste. See, this is the order: two choir-boys, two chanters in surplices, the cross, the holy water, the priest, then Christiane with Professor Cloche, Mademoiselle Louise with Professor Remusot, and Mademoiselle Charlotte with Professor Mas-Roussel. Next come the members of the Board, the medical body, then the public. This is understood. Forward!"

The ecclesiastical staff thereupon left the church, taking their places at the head of the procession. Then a tall gentleman with white hair brushed back over his ears, the typical "scientist," in accordance with the academic form, approached Madame Andermatt, and saluted her with a low bow.

When he had straightened himself up again, with his head uncovered, in order to display his beautiful, scientific head, and his hat resting on his thigh with an imposing air as if he had learned to walk at the Comédie Française, and to show the people his rosette of officer of the Legion of Honor, too big for a modest man.

He began to talk: "Your husband, Madame, has been speaking to me about you just now, and about your condition which gives rise to some affectionate disquietude. He has told me about your doubts and your hesitations as to the probable moment of your delivery."

She reddened to the temples, and she murmured: "Yes, I believed that I would be a mother a very long time before the event. Now I can't tell either—I can't tell either—"

She faltered in a state of utter confusion.

A voice from behind them said: "This station has a very great future before it. I have already obtained surprising effects."

It was Professor Remusot addressing his companion, Louise Oriol. This gentleman was small, with yellow, unkempt hair, and a frock-coat badly cut, the dirty look of a slovenly savant.

Professor Mas-Roussel, who gave his arm to Charlotte Oriol, was a handsome physician, without beard or mustache, smiling, well-groomed, hardly turning gray as yet, a little fleshy, and, with his smooth, clean-shaven face, resembling neither a priest nor an actor, as was the case with Doctor Latonne.

Next came the members of the Board, with Andermatt at their head, and the tall hats of old Oriol and his son towering above them.

Behind them came another row of tall hats, the medical body of Enval, among whom Doctor Bonnefille was not included, his place, indeed, being taken by two new physicians, Doctor Black, a very short old man almost a dwarf, whose excessive piety had surprised the whole district since the day of his arrival; then a very good-looking young fellow, very much given to flirtation, and wearing a small hat, Doctor Mazelli, an Italian attached to the person of the Duc de Ramas — others said, to the person of the Duchesse.

And behind them could be seen the public, a flood of people — bathers, peasants, and inhabitants of the adjoining towns.

The ceremony of blessing the springs was very short. The Abbé Litre sprinkled them one after the other with holy water, which made Doctor Honorat say that he was going to give them new properties with chloride of sodium. Then all the persons specially invited entered the large reading-room, where a collation had been served.

Paul said to Gontran: "How pretty the little Oriol girls have become!"

"They are charming, my dear fellow."

"You have not seen M. le President?" suddenly inquired the ex-jailer overseer.

"Yes, he is over there, in the corner."

"Père Clovis is gathering a big crowd in front of the door."

Already, while moving in the direction of the springs for the purpose of having them blessed, the entire procession had filed off in front of the old invalid, cured the year before, and now again more paralyzed than ever. He would stop the visitors on the road and the last-comers as a matter of choice, in order to tell them his story:

"These waters here, you see, are no good—they cure, 'tis true, but you relapse again afterward, and after this relapse you're half a corpse. As for me, my legs were better before, and here I am now with my arms gone in consequence of the cure. And my legs, they're iron, but iron that you have to cut before it bends."

Andermatt, filled with vexation, had tried to prosecute him in a court of justice and to get him sent to jail for having depreciated the waters of Mont Oriol and having attempted extortion. But he had not succeeded in obtaining a conviction or in shutting the old fellow's mouth.

The moment he was informed that the old vagabond was babbling before the door of the establishment, he rushed out to make Clovis keep silent.

At the side of the highroad, in the center of an excited crowd, he heard angry voices. People pressed forward to listen and to see. Some ladies asked: "What is this?" Some men replied: "'Tis an invalid, whom the waters here have finished." Others believed that an infant had just been squashed. It was also said that a poor woman had got an attack of epilepsy.

Andermatt broke through the crowd, as he knew how to do, by violently pushing his little round stomach between the stomachs of other people. "It proves," Gontran remarked, "the superiority of balls to points."

Père Clovis, sitting on the ditch, whined about his pains, recounted his sufferings in a sniveling tone, while standing in front of him, and separating him from the public, the Oriols, father and son, exasperated, were hurling insults and threats at him as loudly as ever they could.

"That's not true," cried Colosse. "This fellow is a liar, a sham, a poacher, who runs all night through the wood."

But the old fellow, without getting excited, kept reiterating in a high, piercing voice which was heard above the vociferations of the two Oriols: "They've killed me, my good monchieus, they've killed me with their water. They bathed me in it by force last year. And here I am at this moment—here I am!"

Andermatt imposed silence on all, and stooping toward the impotent man, said to him, looking into the depths of his eyes: "If you are worse, it is your own fault, mind. If you listen to me, I undertake to cure you, I do, with fifteen or twenty baths at most. Come and look me up at the establishment in an hour, when the people have all gone away, my good father. In the meantime, hold your tongue."

The old fellow had understood. He became silent, then, after a pause, he answered: "I'm always willing to give it a fair trial. You'll see."

Andermatt caught the two Oriols by the arms and quickly dragged them away; while Père Clovis remained stretched on the grass between his crutches, at the side of the road, blinking his eyes under the rays of the sun.

The puzzled crowd kept pressing round him. Some gentlemen questioned him, but he did not reply, as though he had not heard or understood; and as this curiosity, futile just now, ended by fatiguing him, he began to sing, bareheaded, in a voice as false as it was shrill, an interminable ditty in an unintelligible dialect.

The crowd ebbed away gradually. Only a few children remained standing a long time in front of him, with their fingers in their noses, contemplating him.

Christiane, exceedingly tired, had gone in to take a rest. Paul and Gontran walked about through the new park in the midst of the visitors. Suddenly they saw the company of players, who had also deserted the old Casino, to attach themselves to the growing fortunes of the new.

Mademoiselle Odelin, who had become quite fashionable, was leaning as she walked on the arm of her mother, who had assumed an air of importance. M. Petitnivelle, of the Vaudeville, appeared very attentive to these ladies, who followed M. Lapalme of the Grand Theater of Bordeaux, arguing with the musicians just as of old, the *maestro* Saint Landri, the pianist Javel, the flautist Noirot, and the double-bass Nicordi.

On perceiving Paul and Gontran, Saint Landri rushed toward them. He had, during the winter, got a very small musical composition performed in a very small out-of-the-way theater; but the newspapers had spoken of him with a certain favor, and he now treated Massenet, Beyer, and Gounod contemptuously.

He stretched forth both hands with an outburst of friendly regard, and immediately proceeded to repeat what he had been saying to those gentlemen of the orchestra over whom he was the conductor.

"Yes, my dear friend, it is finished, finished, finished, the hackneyed style of the old school. The melodists have had their day. This is what people cannot understand. Music is a new art, melody is its first lisping. The ignorant ear loves the burden of a song. It takes a child's pleasure, a savage's pleasure in it. I may add that the ears of the people or of the ingenuous public, the simple ears, will always love little songs, airs, in a word. It is an amusement similar to that in which the frequenters of *café* concerts indulge. I am going to make use of a comparison in order to make myself understood. The eye of the rustic loves crude colors and glaring pictures; the eye of the intelligent representative of the middle class who is not artistic loves shades benevolently pretentious and affecting subjects; but the artistic eye, the refined eye, loves, understands, and distinguishes the imperceptible modulations of a single tone, the mysterious harmonies of light touches invisible to most people.

"It is the same with literature. Doorkeepers like romances of adventure, the middle class like novels which appeal to the feelings; while the real lovers of literature care only for the artistic books which are incomprehensible to the others. When an ordinary citizen talks music to me I feel a longing to kill him. And when it is at the opera, I ask him: 'Are you capable of telling me whether the third violin has made a false note in the overture of the third act? No. Then be silent. You have no ear. The man who does not understand, at the same time, the whole and all the instruments separately in an orchestra has no ear, and is no musician. There you are! Good night!'"

He turned round on his heel, and resumed: "For an artist all music is in a chord. Ah! my friend, certain chords madden me, cause a flood of inexpressible happiness to penetrate all my flesh. I have to-day an ear so well exercised, so finished, so matured, that I end by liking even certain false chords, just like a virtuoso whose fully-developed taste amounts to a form of depravity. I am beginning to be a vitiated person who seeks for extreme sensations of hearing. Yes, my friends, certain false notes. What delights! What perverse and profound delights! How this moves, how it shakes the nerves! how it scratches the ear—how it scratches! how it scratches!"

He rubbed his hands together rapturously, and he hummed: "You shall hear my opera—my opera—my opera. You shall hear my opera."

Gontran said: "You are composing an opera?"

"Yes, I have finished it." But the commanding voice of Petrus Martel resounded:

"You understand perfectly! A yellow rocket, and off you go!"

He was giving orders for the fireworks. They joined him, and he explained his arrangements by showing with his outstretched arm, as if he were threatening a hostile fleet, stakes of white wood on the mountain above the gorge, on the opposite side of the valley.

"It is over there that they are to be shot out. I told my pyrotechnist to be at his post at half past eight. The very moment the spectacle is over, I will give the signal from here by a yellow rocket, and then he will illuminate the opening piece."

The Marquis made his appearance: "I am going to drink a glass of water," he said.

Paul and Gontran accompanied him, and again descended the hill. On reaching the establishment, they saw Père Clovis, who had got there, sustained by the two Oriols, followed by Andermatt and by the doctor, and making, every time he trailed his legs on the ground, contortions suggestive of extreme pain.

"Let us go in," said Gontran, "this will be funny."

The paralytic was placed sitting in an armchair. Then Andermatt said to him: "Here is what I propose, old cheat that you are. You are going to be cured immediately by taking two baths a day. And the moment you walk you'll have two hundred francs."

The paralytic began to groan: "My legs, they are iron, my good Monchieu!"

Andermatt made him hold his tongue, and went on: "Now, listen! You shall again have two hundred francs every year up to the time of your death — you understand — up to the time of your death, if you continue to experience the salutary effect of our waters."

The old fellow was in a state of perplexity. The continuous cure was opposed to his plan of action. He asked in a hesitating tone: "But when — when it is closed up — this box of yours — if this should take hold of me again — I can do nothing then — I — seeing that it will be shut up — your water —"

Doctor Latonne interrupted him, and, turning toward Andermatt, said: "Excellent! excellent! We'll cure him every year. This will be even better, and will show the necessity of annual treatment, the indispensability of returning hither. Excellent — this is perfectly clear!"

But the old man repeated afresh: "It will not suit this time, my good Monchieu. My legs, they're iron, iron in bars."

A new idea sprang up in the doctor's mind: "If I got him to try a course of seated walking," he said, "I might hasten the effect of the waters considerably. It is an experiment worth trying."

"Excellent idea," returned Andermatt, adding: "Now, Père Clovis, take yourself off, and don't forget our agreement."

The old fellow went away still groaning; and, when evening came on, all the directors of Mont Oriol came back to dine, for the theatrical representation was announced to take place at half past seven.

The great hall of the new Casino was the place where they were to dine. It was capable of holding a thousand persons.

At seven o'clock the visitors who had not numbered seats presented themselves. At half past seven the hall was filled, and the curtain was raised for the performance of a vaudeville in two acts, which preceded Saint Landri's operetta, interpreted by vocalists from Vichy, who had given their services for the occasion.

Christiane in the front row, between her brother and her husband, suffered a great deal from the heat. Every moment she repeated: "I feel quite exhausted! I feel quite exhausted!"

After the vaudeville, as the operetta was opening, she was becoming ill, and turning round to her husband, said: "My dear Will, I shall have to leave. I am suffocating!"

The banker was annoyed. He was desirous above everything in the world that this *fête* should be a success, from start to finish, without a single hitch. He replied:

"Make every effort to hold out. I beg of you to do so! Your departure would upset everything. You would have to pass through the entire hall!"

But Gontran, who was sitting along with Paul behind her, had overheard. He leaned toward his sister: "You are too warm?" said he.

"Yes, I am suffocating."

"Good. Stay! You are going to have a laugh."

There was a window near. He slipped toward it, got upon a chair, and jumped out without attracting hardly any notice. Then he entered the *café*, which was perfectly empty, stretched his hand out under the bar where he had seen Petrus Martel conceal the signal-rocket, and, having filched it, he ran off to hide himself under a group of trees, and then set it on fire. The swift yellow sheaf flew up toward the clouds, describing a curve, and casting across the sky a long shower of flame-drops. Almost instantaneously a terrible detonation burst forth over the neighboring mountain, and a cluster of stars sent flying sparks through the darkness of the night.

Somebody exclaimed in the hall where the spectators were gathered, and where at the moment Saint Landri's chords were quivering: "They're letting off the fireworks!"

The spectators who were nearest to the door abruptly rose to their feet to make sure about it, and went out with light steps. All the rest turned their eyes toward the windows, but saw nothing, for they were looking at the Limagne. People kept asking: "Is it true? Is it true?"

The impatient assembly got excited, hungering above everything for simple amusements. A voice from outside announced: "It is true! The fireworks are let off!"

Then, in a second everyone in the hall was standing up. They rushed toward the door; they jostled against each other; they yelled at those who obstructed their egress: "Hurry on! hurry on!"

The entire audience, in a short time, had emerged into the park. Saint Landri alone, in a state of exasperation continued beating time in front of his distracted orchestra. Meanwhile, fiery suns succeeded Roman candles in the midst of detonations.

Suddenly, a formidable voice sent forth thrice this wild exclamation: "Stop, in God's name! Stop, in God's name! Stop, in God's name!"

And, as an immense Bengal fire next illuminated the mountain and lighted up in red to the right and blue to the left, the enormous rocks and trees, Petrus Martel could be seen standing on one of the vases of imitation marble that decorated the terrace of the Casino, bareheaded, with his arms in the air, gesticulating and howling.

Then, the great illumination being extinguished, nothing could be seen any longer save the real stars. But immediately another rocket shot up, and Petrus Martel, jumping on the ground, exclaimed: "What a disaster! what a disaster! My God, what a disaster!"

And he passed through the crowd with tragic gestures, with blows of his fist in the empty air, furious stampings of his feet, always repeating: "What a disaster! My God, what a disaster!"

Christiane had taken Paul's arm to get a seat in the open air, and kept looking with delight at the rockets which ascended into the sky.

Her brother came up to her suddenly, and said: "Hey, is it a success? Do you think it is funny?"

She murmured: "What, it is you?"

"Why, yes, it is I. Is it good, hey?"

She began to laugh, finding it really amusing. But Andermatt arrived in a state of great mental distress. He did not understand how such a blow could have come. The rocket had been stolen from the bar to give the signal agreed upon. Such an infamy could only have been perpetrated by some emissary of the old Company, some agent of Doctor Bonnefille!

And he repeated: "'Tis maddening, positively maddening. Here are fireworks worth two thousand three hundred francs destroyed, entirely destroyed!"

Gontran replied: "No, my dear fellow, on a proper calculation, the loss does not mount up to more than a quarter; let us put it at a third, if you like; say seven hundred and sixty-six francs. Your guests will, therefore, have enjoyed fifteen hundred and thirty-four francs' worth of rockets. This truly is not bad."

The banker's anger turned against his brother-in-law. He caught him roughly by the arm: "Gontran, I want to talk seriously to you. Since I have a hold of you, let us take a turn in the walks. Besides, I have five minutes to spare."

Then, turning toward Christiane: "I place you in charge of our friend Bretigny, my dear; but don't remain a long time out—take care of yourself. You might catch cold, you know. Be careful! be careful!"

She murmured: "Never fear, dear."

So Andermatt carried off Gontran. When they were alone, at a little distance from the crowd, the banker stopped: "My dear fellow, 'tis about your financial position that I want to talk."

"About my financial position?"

"Yes, you know it well, your financial position."

"No. But you ought to know it for me, since you lent money to me."

"Well, yes, I do know it, and 'tis for that reason I want to talk to you."

"It seems to me, to say the least of it, that the moment is ill chosen—in the midst of a display of fireworks!"

"The moment, on the contrary, is very well chosen. I am not talking to you in the midst of a display of fireworks, but before a ball."

"Before a ball? I don't understand."

"Well, you are going to understand. Here is your position: you have nothing except debts; and you'll never have anything but debts."

Gontran gravely replied: "You tell me that a little bluntly."

"Yes, because it is necessary. Listen to me! You have eaten up the share which came to you as a fortune from your mother. Let us say no more about that."

"Let us say no more about it."

"As for your father, he possesses a yearly income of thirty thousand francs, say, a capital of about eight hundred thousand francs. Your share, later on, will, therefore, be four hundred thousand francs. Now you owe me — me, personally — one hundred and ninety thousand francs. You owe money besides to usurers."

Gontran muttered in a haughty tone: "Say, to Jews."

"Be it so, to Jews, although among the number there is a churchwarden from Saint Sulpice who made use of a priest as an intermediary between himself and you — but I will not cavil about such trifles. You owe, then, to various usurers, Israelites or Catholics, nearly as much. Let us put it at a hundred and fifty thousand at the lowest estimate. This makes a total of three hundred and forty thousand francs, on which you are paying interest, always borrowing, except with regard to mine, which you do not pay."

"That's right," said Gontran.

"So then, you have nothing more left."

"Nothing, indeed — except my brother-in-law."

"Except your brother-in-law, who has had enough of lending money to you."

"What then?"

"What then, my dear fellow? The poorest peasant living in one of these huts is richer than you."

"Exactly — and next?"

"Next — next —? If your father were to die to-morrow, you would no longer have any resource to get bread — to get bread, mind you — except to take a post as a clerk in my house. And this again would only be a means of disguising the pension which I should be allowing you."

Gontran, in a tone of irritation, said: "My dear William, these things bore me. I know them, besides, just as well as you do, and, I repeat, the moment is ill chosen to remind me about them—with—with so little diplomacy."

"Allow me, let me finish. You can only extricate yourself from it by a marriage. Now, you are a wretched match, in spite of your name, which sounds well without being illustrious. In short, it is not one of those which an heiress, even a Jewish one, buys with a fortune. Therefore, we must find you a wife acceptable and rich—which is not very easy—"

Gontran interrupted him: "Give her name at once—that is the best way."

"Be it so—one of Père Oriol's daughters, whichever you prefer. And this is why I wanted to talk to you before the ball."

"And now explain yourself at greater length," returned Gontran, coldly.

"It is very simple. You see the success I have obtained at the start with this station. Now if I had in my hands, or rather if we had in our hands all the land which this cunning peasant has kept for himself, I could turn it into gold. To speak only of the vineyards which lie between the establishment and the hotel and between the hotel and the Casino, I would pay a million francs for them to-morrow—I, Andermatt. Now, these vineyards and others all round the knoll will be the dowries of these girls. The father told me so again a short time since, not without an object, perhaps. Well, if you were willing, we could do a big stroke of business there, the two of us."

Gontran muttered, with a thoughtful air: "'Tis possible. I'll think over it."

"Do think over it, my dear boy, and don't forget that I never speak of things that are not very sure, or without having given matters every consideration, and realized all the possible consequences and all the decided advantages."

But Gontran, lifting up his arm, as if he had suddenly forgotten all that his brother-in-law had been saying to him: "Look! How beautiful that is!"

The bunch of rockets flamed up, in imitation of a burning palace on which a blazing flag had inscribed on it "Mont Oriol" in letters of fire perfectly red and, right opposite to it, above the plain, the moon, red also, seemed to have come out to contemplate this spectacle. Then, when the palace, after it had been burning for some minutes, exploded like a ship which is blown up, flinging toward the wide heavens fantastic stars which burst in their turn, the moon remained all alone, calm and round, on the horizon.

The public applauded wildly, exclaiming: "Hurrah! Bravo! bravo!"

Andermatt, all of a sudden, said: "Let us go and open the ball, my dear boy. Are you willing to dance the first quadrille face to face with me?"

"Why, certainly, my dear brother-in-law."

"Who have you thought of asking to dance with you? As for me, I have bespoken the Duchesse de Ramas."

Gontran answered in a tone of indifference: "I will ask Charlotte Oriol."

They reascended. As they passed in front of the spot where Christiane was resting with Paul Bretigny, they did not notice the pair. William murmured: "She has followed my advice. She went home to go to bed. She was quite tired out to-day." And he advanced toward the ballroom which the attendants had been getting ready during the fireworks.

But Christiane had not returned to her room, as her husband supposed. As soon as she realized that she was alone with Paul she said to him in a very low tone, while she pressed his hand:

"So then you came. I was waiting for you for the past month. Every morning I kept asking myself, 'Shall I see him to-day?' and every night I kept saying to myself, 'It will be to-morrow then.' Why have you delayed so long, my love?"

He replied with some embarrassment: "I had matters to engage my attention — business."

She leaned toward him, murmuring: "It was not right to leave me here alone with them, especially in my state."

He moved his chair a little away from her.

"Be careful! We might be seen. These rockets light up the whole country around."

She scarcely bestowed a thought on it; she said: "I love you so much!" Then, with sudden starts of joy: "Ah! how happy I feel, how happy I feel at finding that we are once more together, here! Are you thinking about it? What joy, Paul! How we are going to love one another again!"

She sighed, and her voice was so weak that it seemed a mere breath.

"I feel a foolish longing to embrace you, but it is foolish — there! — foolish. It is such a long time since I saw you!"

Then, suddenly, with the fierce energy of an impassioned woman, to whom everything should give way: "Listen! I want — you understand — I want to go with you immediately to the place where we said adieu to one another last year! You remember well, on the road from La Roche Pradière?"

He replied, stupefied: "But this is senseless! You cannot walk farther. You have been standing all day. This is senseless; I will not allow it."

She had risen to her feet, and she said: "I am determined on it! If you do not accompany me, I'll go alone!"

And pointing out to him the moon which had risen: "See here! It was an evening just like this! Do you remember how you kissed my shadow?"

He held her back: "Christiane — listen — this is ridiculous — Christiane!"

She did not reply, and walked toward the descent leading to the vineyards. He knew that calm will which nothing could divert from its purpose, the graceful obstinacy of these blue eyes, of that little forehead of a fair woman that could not be stopped; and he took her arm to sustain her on her way.

"Supposing we are seen, Christiane?"

"You did not say that to me last year. And then, everyone is at the *fête*. We'll be back before our absence can be noticed."

It was soon necessary to ascend by the stony path. She panted, leaning with her whole weight on him, and at every step she said:

"It is good, it is good, to suffer thus!"

He stopped, wishing to bring her back. But she would not listen to him.

"No, no. I am happy. You don't understand this, you. Listen! I feel it leaping in me — our child — your child — what happiness. Give me your hand."

She did not realize that he — this man — was one of the race of lovers who are not of the race of fathers. Since he discovered that she was pregnant, he kept away from her, and was disgusted with her, in spite of himself. He had often in bygone days said that a woman who has performed the function of reproduction is no longer worthy of love. What raised him to a high pitch of tenderness was that soaring of two hearts toward an inaccessible ideal, that entwining of two souls which are immaterial — all those artificial and unreal elements which poets have associated with this passion. In the physical woman he adored the Venus whose sacred side must always preserve the pure form of sterility. The idea of a little creature which owed its birth to him, a human larva stirring in that body defiled by it and already grown ugly, inspired him with an almost unconquerable repugnance. Maternity had made this woman a brute. She was no longer the exceptional being adored and dreamed about, but the animal that reproduces its species. And even a material disgust was mingled in him with these loathings of his mind.

How could she have felt or divined this — she whom each movement of the child she yearned for attached the more closely to her lover? This man whom she adored, whom she had every day loved a little more since the moment of their first kiss, had not only penetrated to the bottom of her heart, but had given her the proof that he had also entered into the very depths of her flesh, that he had sown his own life there, that he was going to come forth from her, again becoming quite small. Yes, she carried him there under her crossed hands, himself, her good, her dear, her tenderly beloved one, springing up again in her womb by the mystery of nature. And she loved him doubly, now that she had him in two forms — the big, and the little one as yet unknown, the one whom she saw, touched, embraced, and could hear speaking to her, and the one whom she could up to this only feel stirring under her skin. They had by this time reached the road.

"You were waiting for me over there that evening," said she. And she held her lips out to him.

He kissed them, without replying, with a cold kiss.

She murmured for the second time: "Do you remember how you embraced me on the ground. We were like this — look!"

And in the hope that he would begin it all over again she commenced running to get some distance away from him. Then she stopped, out of breath, and waited, standing in the middle of the road. But the moon, which lengthened out her profile on the ground, traced there the protuberance of her swollen figure. And Paul, beholding at his feet the shadow of her pregnancy, remained unmoved at sight of it, wounded in his poetic sense with shame, exasperated that she was not able to share his feelings or divine his thoughts, that she had not sufficient coquetry, tact, and feminine delicacy to understand all the shades which give such a different complexion to circumstances; and he said to her with impatience in his voice:

"Look here, Christiane! This child's play is ridiculous."

She came back to him moved, saddened, with outstretched arms, and, flinging herself on his breast:

"Ah! you love me less. I feel it! I am sure of it!"

He took pity on her, and, encircling her head with his arms, he imprinted two long sweet kisses on her eyes.

Then in silence they retraced their steps. He could find nothing to say to her; and, as she leaned on him, exhausted by fatigue, he quickened his pace so that he might no longer feel against his side the touch of this enlarged figure. When they were near the hotel, they separated, and she went up to her own apartment.

The orchestra at the Casino was playing dance-music; and Paul went to look at the ball. It was a waltz; and they were all waltzing — Doctor Latonne with the younger Madame Paille, Andermatt with Louise Oriol, handsome Doctor Mazelli with the Duchesse de Ramas, and Gontran with Charlotte Oriol. He was whispering in her ear in that tender fashion which denotes a courtship begun; and she was smiling behind her fan, blushing, and apparently delighted.

Paul heard a voice saying behind him: "Look here! look here at M. de Ravenel whispering gallantries to my fair patient."

He added, after a pause: "And there is a pearl, good, gay, simple, devoted, upright, you know, an excellent creature. She is worth ten of the elder sister. I have known them since their childhood—these little girls. And yet the father prefers the elder one, because she is more—more like him—more of a peasant—less upright—more thrifty—more cunning—and more—more jealous. Ah! she is a good girl, all the same. I would not like to say anything bad of her; but, in spite of myself, I compare them, you understand—and, after having compared them, I judge them—there you are!"

The waltz was coming to an end; Gontran went to join his friend, and, perceiving the doctor:

"Ah! tell me now—there appears to me to be a remarkable increase in the medical body at Enval. We have a Doctor Mazelli who waltzes to perfection and an old little Doctor Black who seems on very good terms with Heaven."

But Doctor Honorat was discreet. He did not like to sit in judgment on his professional brethren.

CHAPTER X.

Gontran's Choice

The burning question now was that of the physicians at Enval. They had suddenly made themselves the masters of the district, and absorbed all the attention and all the enthusiasm of the inhabitants. Formerly the springs flowed under the authority of Doctor Bonnefille alone, in the midst of the harmless animosities of restless Doctor Latonne and placid Doctor Honorat.

Now, it was a very different thing. Since the success planned during the winter by Andermatt had quite taken definite shape, thanks to the powerful co-operation of Professors Cloche, Mas-Roussel, and Remusot, who had each brought there a contingent of two or three hundred patients at least, Doctor Latonne, inspector of the new establishment, had become a big personage, specially patronized by Professor Mas-Roussel, whose pupil he had been, and whose deportment and gestures he imitated.

Docter Bonnefille was scarcely ever talked about any longer. Furious, exasperated, railing against Mont Oriol, the old physician remained the whole day in the old establishment with a few old patients who had kept faithful to him.

In the minds of some invalids, indeed, he was the only person that understood the true properties of the waters; he possessed, so to speak, their secret, since he had officially administered them from the time the station was first established.

Doctor Honorat barely managed to retain his practice among the natives of Auvergne. With the moderate income he derived from this source he contented himself, keeping on good terms with everybody, and consoled himself by much preferring cards and wine to medicine. He did not, however, go quite so far as to love his professional brethren.

Doctor Latonne would, therefore, have continued to be the great soothsayer of Mont Oriol, if one morning there had not appeared a very small man, nearly a dwarf, whose big head sunk between his shoulders, big round eyes, and big hands combined to produce a very odd-looking individual. This new physician, M. Black, introduced into the district by Professor Remusot immediately excited attention by his excessive devotion. Nearly every morning, between two visits, he went into a church for a few minutes, and he received communion nearly every Sunday. The curé soon got him some patients, old maids, poor people whom he attended for nothing, pious ladies who asked the advice of their spiritual director before calling on a man of science, whose sentiments, reserve, and professional modesty, they wished to know before everything else.

Then, one day, the arrival of the Princess de Maldebourg, an old German Highness, was announced — a very fervent Catholic, who on the very evening when she first appeared in the district, sent for Doctor Black on the recommendation of a Roman cardinal. From that moment he was the fashion. It was good taste, good form, the correct thing, to be attended by him. He was the only doctor, it was said, who was a perfect gentleman — the only one in whom a woman could repose absolute confidence.

And from morning till evening this little man with the bulldog's head, who always spoke in a subdued tone in every corner with everybody, might be seen rushing from one hotel to the other. He appeared to have important secrets to confide or to receive, for he could constantly be met holding long mysterious conferences in the lobbies with the masters of the hotels, with his patients' chambermaids, with anyone who was brought into contact with the invalids. As soon as he saw any lady of his acquaintance in the street, he went straight up to her with his short, quick step, and immediately began to mumble fresh and minute directions, after the fashion of a priest at confession.

The old women especially adored him. He would listen to their stories to the end without interrupting them, took note of all their observations, all their questions, and all their wishes.

He increased or diminished each day the proportion of water to be consumed by his patients, which made them feel perfect confidence in the care taken of them by him.

"We stopped yesterday at two glasses and three-quarters," he would say; "well, to-day we shall only take two glasses and a half, and to-morrow three glasses. Don't forget! To-morrow, three glasses. I am very, very particular about it!"

And all the patients were convinced that he was very particular about it, indeed.

In order not to forget these figures and fractions of figures, he wrote them down in a memorandum-book, in order that he might never make a mistake. For the patient does not pardon a mistake of a single half-glass. He regulated and modified with equal minuteness the duration of the daily baths in virtue of principles known only to himself.

Doctor Latonne, jealous and exasperated, disdainfully shrugged his shoulders, and declared: "This is a swindler!" His hatred against Doctor Black had even led him occasionally to run down the mineral waters. "Since we can scarcely tell how they act, it is quite impossible to prescribe every day modifications of the dose, which any therapeutic law cannot regulate. Proceedings of this kind do the greatest injury to medicine."

Doctor Honorat contented himself with smiling. He always took care to forget, five minutes after a consultation, the number of glasses which he had ordered. "Two more or less," said he to Gontran in his hours of gaiety, "there is only the spring to take notice of it; and yet this scarcely incommodes it!" The only wicked pleasantry that he permitted himself on his religious brother-physician consisted in describing him as "the doctor of the Holy Sitting-Bath." His jealousy was of the prudent, sly, and tranquil kind.

He added sometimes: "Oh, as for him, he knows the patient thoroughly; and this is often better than to know the disease!"

But lo! there arrived one morning at the hotel of Mont Oriol a noble Spanish family, the Duke and Duchess of Ramas-Aldavarra, who brought with her her own physician, an Italian, Doctor Mazelli from Milan. He was a man of thirty, a tall, thin, very handsome young fellow, wearing only mustaches. From the first evening, he made a conquest of the *table d'hôte*, for the Duke, a melancholy man, attacked with monstrous obesity, had a horror of isolation, and desired to take his meals in the same dining-room as the other patients. Doctor Mazelli already knew by their names almost all the frequenters of the hotel; he had a kindly word for every man, a compliment for every woman, a smile even for every servant.

Placed at the right-hand side of the Duchess, a beautiful woman of between thirty-five and forty, with a pale complexion, black eyes, blue-black hair, he would say to her as each dish came round:

"Very little," or else, "No, not this," or else, "Yes, take some of that." And he would himself pour out the liquid which she was to drink with very great care, measuring exactly the proportions of wine and water which he mingled.

He also regulated the Duke's food, but with visible carelessness. The patient, however, took no heed of his advice, devoured everything with bestial voracity, drank at every meal two decanters of pure wine, then went tumbling about in a chaise for air in front of the hotel, and began whining with pain and groaning over his bad digestion.

After the first dinner, Doctor Mazelli, who had judged and weighed all around him with a single glance, went to join Gontran, who was smoking a cigar on the terrace of the Casino, told his name, and began to chat. At the end of an hour, they were on intimate terms. Next day, he got himself introduced to Christiane just as she was leaving the bath, won her good-will after ten minutes' conversation, and brought her that very day into contact with the Duchess, who no longer cared for solitude.

He kept watch over everything in the abode of the Spaniards, gave excellent advice to the chef about cooking, excellent hints to the chambermaid on the hygiene of the head in order to preserve in her mistress's hair its luster, its superb shade, and its abundance, very useful information to the coachman about veterinary medicine; and he knew how to make the hours swift and light, to invent distractions, and to pick up in the hotels casual acquaintances but always prudently chosen.

The Duchess said to Christiane, when speaking of him: "He is a wonderful man, dear Madame. He knows everything; he does everything. It is to him that I owe my figure."

"How, your figure?"

"Yes, I was beginning to grow fat, and he saved me with his regimen and his liqueurs."

Moreover, Mazelli knew how to make medicine itself interesting; he spoke about it with such ease, with such gaiety, and with a sort of light scepticism which helped to convince his listeners of his superiority.

"'Tis very simple," said he; "I don't believe in remedies — or rather I hardly believe in them. The old-fashioned medicine started with this principle—that there is a remedy for everything. God, they believe, in His divine bounty, has created drugs for all maladies, only He has left to men, through malice, perhaps, the trouble of discovering these drugs. Now, men have discovered an incalculable number of them without ever knowing exactly what disease each of them is suited for. In reality there are no remedies; there are only maladies. When a malady declares itself, it is necessary to interrupt its course, according to some, to precipitate it, according to others, by some means or another. Each school extols its own method. In the same case, we see the most antagonistic systems employed, and the most opposed kinds of medicine—ice by one and extreme heat by the other, dieting by this doctor and forced nourishment by that. I am not speaking of the innumerable poisonous products extracted from minerals or vegetables, which chemistry procures for us. All this acts, 'tis true, but nobody knows how. Sometimes it succeeds, and sometimes it kills."

And, with much liveliness, he pointed out the impossibility of certainty, the absence of all scientific basis as long as organic chemistry, biological chemistry had not become the starting-point of a new medicine. He related anecdotes, monstrous errors of the greatest physicians, and proved the insanity and the falsity of their pretended science.

"Make the body discharge its functions," said he. "Make the skin, the muscles, all the organs, and, above all, the stomach, which is the foster-father of the entire machine, its regulator and life-warehouse, discharge their functions."

He asserted that, if he liked, by nothing save regimen, he could make people gay or sad, capable of physical work or intellectual work, according to the nature of the diet which he imposed on them. He could even act on the faculties of the brain, on the memory, the imagination, on all the manifestations of intelligence. And he ended jocosely with these words:

"For my part, I nurse my patients with massage and curaçoa."

He attributed marvelous results to massage, and spoke of the Dutchman Hamstrang as of a god performing miracles. Then, showing his delicate white hands:

"With those, you might resuscitate the dead."

And the Duchess added: "The fact is that he performs massage to perfection."

He also lauded alcoholic beverages, in small proportions to excite the stomach at certain moments; and he composed mixtures, cleverly prepared, which the Duchess had to drink, at fixed hours, either before or after her meals.

He might have been seen each morning entering the Casino Café about half past nine and asking for his bottles. They were brought to him fastened with little silver locks of which he had the key. He would pour out a little of one, a little of another, slowly into a very pretty blue glass, which a very correct footman held up respectfully.

Then the doctor would give directions: "See! Bring this to the Duchess in her bath, to drink it, before she dresses herself, when coming out of the water."

And when anyone asked him through curiosity: "What have you put into it?" he would answer: "Nothing but refined aniseed-cordial, very pure curaçoa, and excellent bitters."

This handsome doctor, in a few days, became the center of attraction for all the invalids. And every sort of device was resorted to, in order to attract a few opinions from him.

When he was passing along through the walks in the park, at the hour of promenade, one heard nothing but that exclamation of "Doctor" on all the chairs where sat the beautiful women, the young women, who were resting themselves a little between two glasses of the Christiane Spring. Then, when he stopped with a smile on his lip, they would draw him aside for some minutes into the little path beside the river. At first, they talked about one thing or another; then discreetly, skillfully, coquettishly, they came to the question of health, but in an indifferent fashion as if they were touching on sundry topics.

For this medical man was not at the disposal of the public. He was not paid by them, and people could not get him to visit them at their own houses. He belonged to the Duchess, only to the Duchess. This situation even stimulated people's efforts, and provoked their desires. And, as it was whispered positively that the Duchess was jealous, very jealous, there was a desperate struggle between all these ladies to get advice from the handsome Italian doctor. He gave it without forcing them to entreat him very strenuously.

Then, among the women whom he had favored with his advice arose an interchange of intimate confidences, in order to give clear proof of his solicitude.

"Oh! my dear, he asked me questions — but such questions!"

"Very indiscreet?"

"Oh! indiscreet! Say frightful. I actually did not know what answers to give him. He wanted to know things — but such things!"

"It was the same way with me. He questioned me a great deal about my husband!"

"And me, also — together with details so — so personal! These questions are very embarrassing. However, we understand perfectly well that it is necessary to ask them."

"Oh! of course. Health depends on these minute details. As for me, he promised to perform massage on me at Paris this winter. I have great need of it to supplement the treatment here."

"Tell me, my dear, what do you intend to do in return? He cannot take fees."

"Good heavens! my idea was to present him with a scarf-pin. He must be fond of them, for he has already two or three very nice ones."

"Oh! how you embarrass me! The same notion was in my head. In that case I'll give him a ring."

And they concocted surprises in order to please him, thought of ingenious presents in order to touch him, graceful pleasantries in order to fascinate him. He became the "talk of the day," the great subject of conversation, the sole object of public attention, till the news spread that Count Gontran de Ravenel was paying his addresses to Charlotte Oriol with a view to marrying her. And this at once led to a fresh outburst of deafening clamor in Enval.

Since the evening when he had opened with her the inaugural ball at the Casino, Gontran had tied himself to the young girl's skirts. He publicly showed her all those little attentions of men who want to please without hiding their object; and their ordinary relations assumed at the same time a character of gallantry, playful and natural, which seemed likely to lead to love.

They saw one another nearly every day, for the two girls had conceived feelings of strong friendship toward Christiane, into which, no doubt, there entered a considerable element of gratified vanity. Gontran suddenly showed a disposition to remain constantly at his sister's side; and he began to organize parties for the morning and entertainments for the evening, which greatly astonished Christiane and Paul. Then they noticed that he was devoting himself to Charlotte; he gaily teased her, paid her compliments without appearing to do so, and manifested toward her in a thousand ways that tender care which tends to unite two beings in bonds of affection. The young girl, already accustomed to the free and familiar manners of this gay Parisian youth, did not at first see anything remarkable in these attentions; and, abandoning herself to the impulses of her honest and confiding heart, she began to laugh and enjoy herself with him as she might have done with a brother.

Now, she had returned home with her elder sister, after an evening party at which Gontran had several times attempted to kiss her in consequence of forfeits due by her in a game of "fly-pigeon," when Louise, who had appeared anxious and nervous for some time past, said to her in an abrupt tone:

"You would do well to be a little careful about your deportment. M. Gontran is not a suitable companion for you."

"Not a suitable companion? What has he done?"

"You know well what I mean—don't play the ninny! In the way you're going on, you would soon compromise yourself; and if you don't know how to watch over your conduct, it is my business to see after it."

Charlotte, confused, and filled with shame, faltered: "But I don't know—I assure you—I have seen nothing—"

Her sister sharply interrupted her: "Listen! Things must not go on this way. If he wants to marry you, it is for papa—for papa to consider the matter and to give an answer; but, if he only wants to trifle with you, he must desist at once!"

Then, suddenly, Charlotte got annoyed without knowing why or with what. She was indignant at her sister having taken it on herself to direct her actions and to reprimand her; and, in a trembling voice, and with tears in her eyes, she told her that she should not have interfered in what did not concern her. She stammered in her exasperation, divining by a vague but unerring instinct the jealousy that had been aroused in the embittered heart of Louise.

They parted without embracing one another, and Charlotte wept when she got into bed, as she thought over things that she had never foreseen or suspected.

Gradually her tears ceased to flow, and she began to reflect. It was true, nevertheless, that Gontran's demeanor toward her had altered. She had enjoyed his acquaintance hitherto without understanding him. She understood him now. At every turn he kept repeating to her pretty compliments full of delicate flattery. On one occasion he had kissed her hand. What were his intentions? She pleased him, but to what extent? Was it possible by any chance that he desired to marry her? And all at once she imagined that she could hear somewhere in the air, in the silent night through whose empty spaces her dreams were flitting, a voice exclaiming, "Comtesse de Ravenel."

The emotion was so vivid that she sat up in the bed; then, with her naked feet, she felt for her slippers under the chair over which she had thrown her clothes, and she went to open the window without consciousness of what she was doing, in order to find space for her hopes. She could hear what they were saying in the room below stairs, and Colosse's voice was raised: "Let it alone! let it alone! There will be time enough to see to it. Father will arrange that. There is no harm up to this. 'Tis father that will do the thing."

She noticed that the window in front of the house, just below that at which she was standing, was still lighted up. She asked herself: "Who is there now? What are they talking about?" A shadow passed over the luminous wall. It was her sister. So then, she had not yet gone to bed. Why? But the light was presently extinguished; and Charlotte began to think about other things that were agitating her heart.

She could not go to sleep now. Did he love her? Oh! no; not yet. But he might love her, since she had caught his fancy. And if he came to love her much, desperately, as people love in society, he would certainly marry her.

Born in a house of vinedressers, she had preserved, although educated in the young ladies' convent at Clermont, the modesty and humility of a peasant girl. She used to think that she might marry a notary, perhaps, or a barrister or a doctor; but the ambition to become a real lady of high social position, with a title of nobility attached to her name had never entered her mind. Even when she had just finished the perusal of some love-story, and was musing over the glimpse presented to her of such a charming prospect for a few minutes, it would speedily vanish from her soul just as chimeras vanish. Now, here was this unforeseen, inconceivable thing, which had been suddenly conjured up by some words of her sister, apparently drawing near her after the fashion of a ship's sail driven onward by the wind.

Every time she drew breath, she kept repeating with her lips: "Comtesse de Ravenel." And the shades of her dark eyelashes, as they closed in the night, were illuminated with visions. She saw beautiful drawing-rooms brilliantly lighted up, beautiful women greeting her with smiles, beautiful carriages waiting before the steps of a château, and grand servants in livery bowing as she passed.

She felt heated in her bed; her heart was beating. She rose up a second time in order to drink a glass of water, and to remain standing in her bare feet for a few moments on the cold floor of her apartment.

Then, somewhat calmed, she ended by falling asleep. But she awakened at dawn, so much had the agitation of her heart passed into her veins.

She felt ashamed of her little room with its white walls, washed with water by a rustic glazier, her poor cotton curtains, and some straw-chairs which never quitted their place at the two corners of her chest of drawers.

She realized that she was a peasant in the midst of these rude articles of furniture which bespoke her origin. She felt herself lowly, unworthy of this handsome, mocking young fellow, whose fair hair and laughing face had floated before her eyes, had disappeared from her vision and then come back, had gradually engrossed her thoughts, and had already found a place in her heart.

Then she jumped out of bed and ran to look for her glass, her little toilette-glass, as large as the center of a plate; after that, she got into bed again, her mirror between her hands; and she looked at her face surrounded by her hair which hung loose on the white background of the pillow.

Presently she laid down on the bedclothes the little piece of glass which reflected her lineaments, and she thought how difficult it would be for such an alliance to take place, so great was the distance between them. Thereupon a feeling of vexation seized her by the throat. But immediately afterward she gazed at her image, once more smiling at herself in order to look nice, and, as she considered herself pretty, the difficulties disappeared.

When she went down to breakfast, her sister, who wore a look of irritation, asked her:

"What do you propose to do to-day?"

Charlotte replied unhesitatingly: "Are we not going in the carriage to Royat with Madame Andermatt?"

Louise returned: "You are going alone, then; but you might do something better, after what I said to you last night."

The younger sister interrupted her: "I don't ask for your advice—mind your own business!"

And they did not speak to one another again.

Père Oriol and Jacques came in, and took their seats at the table. The old man asked almost immediately: "What are you doing to-day, girls?"

Charlotte said without giving her sister time to answer: "As for me, I am going to Royat with Madame Andermatt."

The two men eyed her with an air of satisfaction; and the father muttered with that engaging smile which he could put on when discussing any business of a profitable character: "That's good! that's good!"

She was more surprised at this secret complacency which she observed in their entire bearing than at the visible anger of Louise; and she asked herself, in a somewhat disturbed frame of mind: "Can they have been talking this over all together?"

As soon as the meal was over, she went up again to her room, put on her hat, seized her parasol, threw a light cloak over her arm, and she went off in the direction of the hotel, for they were to start at half past one.

Christiane expressed her astonishment at finding that Louise had not come.

Charlotte felt herself flushing as she replied: "She is a little fatigued; I believe she has a headache."

And they stepped into the landau, the big landau with six seats, which they always used. The Marquis and his daughter remained at the lower end, while the Oriol girl found herself seated at the opposite side between the two young men.

They passed in front of Tournoel; they proceeded along the foot of the mountain, by a beautiful winding road, under the walnut and chestnut-trees. Charlotte several times felt conscious that Gontran was pressing close up to her, but was too prudent to take offense at it. As he sat at her right-hand side, he spoke with his face close to her cheek; and she did not venture to turn round to answer him, through fear of touching his mouth, which she felt already on her lips, and also through fear of his eyes, whose glance would have unnerved her.

He whispered in her ear gallant absurdities, laughable fooleries, agreeable and well-turned compliments.

Christiane scarcely uttered a word, heavy and sick from her pregnancy. And Paul appeared sad, preoccupied. The Marquis alone chatted without unrest or anxiety, in the sprightly, graceful style of a selfish old nobleman.

They got down at the park of Royat to listen to the music, and Gontran, offering Charlotte his arm, set forth with her in front. The army of bathers, on the chairs, around the kiosk, where the leader of the orchestra was keeping time with the brass instruments and the violins, watched the promenaders filing past. The women exhibited their dresses by stretching out their legs as far as the bars of the chairs in front of them, and their dainty summer head-gear made them look more fascinating.

Charlotte and Gontran sauntered through the midst of the people who occupied the seats, looking out for faces of a comic type to find materials for their pleasantries.

Every moment he heard some one saying behind them: "Look there! what a pretty girl!" He felt flattered, and asked himself whether they took her for his sister, his wife, or his mistress.

Christiane, seated between her father and Paul, saw them passing several times, and thinking they exhibited too much youthful frivolity, she called them over to her to soberize them. But they paid no attention to her, and went on vagabondizing through the crowd, enjoying themselves with their whole hearts.

She said in a whisper to Paul Bretigny: "He will finish by compromising her. It will be necessary that we should speak to him this evening when he comes back."

Paul replied: "I had already thought about it. You are quite right."

They went to dine in one of the restaurants of Clermont-Ferrand, those of Royat being no good, according to the Marquis, who was a gourmand, and they returned at nightfall.

Charlotte had become serious, Gontran having strongly pressed her hand, while presenting her gloves to her, before she quitted the table. Her young girl's conscience was suddenly troubled. This was an avowal! an advance! an impropriety! What ought she to do? Speak to him? but about what? To be offended would be ridiculous. There was need of so much tact in these circumstances. But by doing nothing, by saying nothing, she produced the impression of accepting his advances, of becoming his accomplice, of answering "yes" to this pressure of the hand.

And she weighed the situation, accusing herself of having been too gay and too familiar at Royat, thinking just now that her sister was right, that she was compromised, lost! The carriage rolled along the road. Paul and Gontran smoked in silence; the Marquis slept; Christiane gazed at the stars; and Charlotte found it hard to keep back her tears—for she had swallowed three glasses of champagne.

When they had got back, Christiane said to her father: "As it is dark, you have to see this young girl home."

The Marquis, without delay, offered her his arm, and went off with her.

Paul laid his hands on Gontran's shoulders, and whispered in his ear: "Come and have five minutes' talk with your sister and myself."

And they went up to the little drawing-room communicating with the apartments of Andermatt and his wife.

When they were seated, Christiane said: "Listen! M. Paul and I want to give you a good lecture."

"A good lecture! But about what? I'm as wise as an image for want of opportunities."

"Don't trifle! You are doing a very imprudent and very dangerous thing without thinking on it. You are compromising this young girl."

He appeared much astonished. "Who is that? Charlotte?"

"Yes, Charlotte!"

"I'm compromising Charlotte?—I?"

"Yes, you are compromising her. Everyone here is talking about it, and this evening again in the park at Royat you have been very—very light. Isn't that so, Bretigny?"

Paul answered: "Yes, Madame, I entirely share your sentiments."

Gontran turned his chair around, bestrode it like a horse, took a fresh cigar, lighted it, then burst out laughing.

"Ha! so then I am compromising Charlotte Oriol?"

He waited a few seconds to see the effect of his words, then added: "And who told you I did not intend to marry her?"

Christiane gave a start of amazement.

"Marry her? You? Why, you're mad!"

"Why so?"

"That—that little peasant girl!"

"Tra! la! la! Prejudices! Is it from your husband you learned them?"

As she made no response to this direct argument, he went on, putting both questions and answers himself:

"Is she pretty?—Yes! Is she well educated?—Yes! And more ingenuous, more simple, and more honest than girls in good society. She knows as much as another, for she can speak both English and the language of Auvergne—that makes two foreign languages. She will be as rich as any heiress of the Faubourg Saint-Germain—as it was formerly called (they are now going to christen it Faubourg Sainte-Deche)—and finally, if she is a peasant's daughter, she'll be only all the more healthy to present me with fine children. Enough!"

As he had always the appearance of laughing and jesting, Christiane asked hesitatingly: "Come! are you speaking seriously?"

"Faith, I am! She is charming, this little girl! She has a good heart and a pretty face, a genial character and a good temper, rosy cheeks, bright eyes, white teeth, ruby lips, and flowing tresses, glossy, thick, and full of soft folds. And then her vinedressing father will be as rich as Crœsus, thanks to your husband, my dear sister. What more do you want? The daughter of a peasant! Well, is not the daughter of a peasant as good as any of those money-lenders' daughters who pay such high prices for dukes with doubtful titles, or any of the daughters born of aristocratic prostitution whom the Empire has given us, or any of the daughters with double sires whom we meet in society? Why, if I did marry this girl I should be doing the first wise and rational act of my life!"

Christiane reflected, then, all of a sudden, convinced, overcome, delighted, she exclaimed:

"Why, all you have said is true! It is quite true, quite right! So then you are going to marry her, my little Gontran?"

It was he who now sought to moderate her ardor. "Not so quick—not so quick—let me reflect in my turn. I only declare that, if I did marry her, I would be doing the first wise and rational act of my life. That does not go so far as saying that I will marry her; but I am thinking over it; I am studying her, I am paying her a little attention to see if I can like her sufficiently. In short, I don't answer 'yes' or 'no,' but it is nearer to 'yes' than to 'no.'"

Christiane turned toward Paul: "What do you think of it, Monsieur Bretigny?"

She called him at one time Monsieur Bretigny, and at another time Bretigny only.

He, always fascinated by the things in which he imagined he saw an element of greatness, by unequal matches which seemed to him to exhibit generosity, by all the sentimental parade in which the human heart masks itself, replied: "For my part I think he is right in this. If he likes her, let him marry her; he could not find better."

But, the Marquis and Andermatt having returned, they had to talk about other subjects; and the two young men went to the Casino to see whether the gaming-room was still open.

From that day forth Christiane and Paul appeared to favor Gontran's open courtship of Charlotte.

The young girl was more frequently invited to the hotel by Christiane, and was treated in fact as if she were already a member of the family. She saw all this clearly, understood it, and was quite delighted at it. Her little head throbbed like a drum, and went building fantastic castles in Spain. Gontran, in the meantime had said nothing definite to her; but his demeanor, all his words, the tone that he assumed with her, his more serious air of gallantry, the caress of his glance seemed every day to keep repeating to her: "I have chosen you; you are to be my wife."

And the tone of sweet affection, of discreet self-surrender, of chaste reserve which she now adopted toward him, seemed to give this answer: "I know it, and I'll say 'yes' whenever you ask for my hand."

In the young girl's family, the matter was discussed in confidential whispers. Louise scarcely opened her lips now except to annoy her with hurtful allusions, with sharp and sarcastic remarks. Père Oriol and Jacques appeared to be content.

She did not ask herself, all the same, whether she loved this good-looking suitor, whose wife she was, no doubt, destined to become. She liked him, she was constantly thinking about him; she considered him handsome, witty, elegant—she was speculating, above all, on what she would do when she was married to him.

In Enval people had forgotten the malignant rivalries of the physicians and the proprietors of springs, the theories as to the supposed attachment of the Duchess de Ramas for her doctor, all the scandals that flow along with the waters of thermal stations, in order to occupy their minds entirely with this extraordinary circumstance—that Count Gontran de Ravenel was going to marry the younger of the Oriol girls.

When Gontran thought the moment had arrived, taking Andermatt by the arm, one morning, as they were rising from the breakfast-table, he said to him: "My dear fellow, strike while the iron is hot! Here is the exact state of affairs: The little one is waiting for me to propose, without my having committed myself at all; but, you may be quite certain she will not refuse me. It is necessary to sound her father about it in such a way as to promote, at the same time, your interests and mine."

Andermatt replied: "Make your mind easy. I'll take that on myself. I am going to sound him this very day without compromising you and without thrusting you forward; and when the situation is perfectly clear, I'll talk about it."

"Capital!"

Then, after a few moments' silence, Gontran added: "Hold on! This is perhaps my last day of bachelorhood. I am going on to Royat, where I saw some acquaintances of mine the other day. I'll be back to-night, and I'll tap at your door to know the result."

He saddled his horse, and proceeded along by the mountain, inhaling the pure, genial air, and sometimes starting into a gallop to feel the keen caress of the breeze brushing the fresh skin of his cheek and tickling his mustache.

The evening-party at Royat was a jolly affair. He met some of his friends there who had brought girls along with them. They lingered a long time at supper; he returned home at a very late hour. Everyone had gone to bed in the hotel of Mont Oriol when Gontran went to tap at Andermatt's door. There was no answer at first; then, as the knocking became much louder, a hoarse voice, the voice of one disturbed while asleep, grunted from within: "Who's there?"

"'Tis I, Gontran."

"Wait—I'm opening the door."

Andermatt appeared in his nightshirt, with puffed-up face, bristling chin, and a silk handkerchief tied round his head. Then he got back into bed, sat down in it, and with his hands stretched over the sheets:

"Well, my dear fellow, this won't do me. Here is how matters stand: I have sounded this old fox Oriol, without mentioning you, referring merely to a certain friend of mine — I have perhaps allowed him to suppose that the person I meant was Paul Bretigny — as a suitable match for one of his daughters, and I asked what dowry he would give her. He answered me by asking in his turn what were the young man's means; and I fixed the amount at three hundred thousand francs with expectations."

"But I have nothing," muttered Gontran.

"I am lending you the money, my dear fellow. If we work this business between us, your lands would yield me enough to reimburse me."

Gontran sneered: "All right. I'll have the woman and you the money."

But Andermatt got quite annoyed. "If I am to interest myself in your affairs in order that you might insult me, there's an end of it — let us say no more about it!"

Gontran apologized: "Don't get vexed, my dear fellow, and excuse me! I know that you are a very honest man of irreproachable loyalty in matters of business. I would not ask you for the price of a drink if I were your coachman; but I would intrust my fortune to you if I were a millionaire."

William, less excited, rejoined: "We'll return presently to that subject. Let us first dispose of the principal question. The old man was not taken in by my wiles, and said to me in reply: 'It depends on which of them is the girl you're talking about. If 'tis Louise, the elder one, here's her dowry.' And he enumerated for me all the lands that are around the establishment, those which are between the baths and the hotel and between the hotel and the Casino, all those, in short, which are indispensable to us, those which have for me an inestimable value. He gives, on the contrary, to the younger girl the other side of the mountain, which will be worth as much money later on, no doubt, but which is worth nothing to me. I tried in every possible way to make him modify their partition and invert the lots. I was only knocking my head against the obstinacy of a mule. He will not change; he has fixed his resolution. Reflect — what do you think of it?"

Gontran, much troubled, much perplexed, replied: "What do you think of it yourself? Do you believe that he was thinking of me in thus distributing the shares in the land?"

"I haven't a doubt of it. The clown said to himself: 'As he likes the younger one, let us take care of the bag.' He hopes to give you his daughter while keeping his best lands. And again perhaps his object is to give the advantage to the elder girl. He prefers her — who knows? — she is more like himself — she is more cunning — more artful — more practical. I believe she is a strapping lass, this one — for my part, if I were in your place, I would change my stick from one shoulder to the other."

But Gontran, stunned, began muttering: "The devil! the devil! the devil! And Charlotte's lands — you don't want them?"

Andermatt exclaimed: "I — no — a thousand times, no! I want those which are close to my baths, my hotel, and my Casino. It is very simple, I wouldn't give anything for the others, which could only be sold, at a later period, in small lots to private individuals."

Gontran kept still repeating: "The devil! the devil! the devil! here's a plaguy business! So then you advise me?"

"I don't advise you at all. I think you would do well to reflect before deciding between the two sisters."

"Yes — yes — that's true — I will reflect — I am going to sleep first — that brings counsel."

He rose up; Andermatt held him back.

"Excuse me, my dear boy! — a word or two on another matter. I may not appear to understand, but I understand very well the allusions with which you sting me incessantly, and I don't want any more of them. You reproach me with being a Jew — that is to say, with making money, with being avaricious, with being a speculator, so as to come close to sheer swindling. Now, my friend, I spend my life in lending you this money that I make — not without trouble — or rather in giving it to you. However, let that be! But there is one point that I don't admit! No, I am not avaricious. The proof of it is that I have made presents to your sister, presents of twenty thousand francs at a time, that I gave your father a Theodore Rousseau worth ten thousand francs, to which he took a fancy, and that I presented you, when you were coming here, with the horse on which you rode a little while ago to Royat. In what then am I avaricious? In not letting myself be robbed. And we are all like that among my race, and we are right, Monsieur. I want to say it to you once for all. We are regarded as misers because we know the exact value of things. For you a piano is a piano, a chair is a chair, a pair of trousers is a pair of trousers. For us also, but it represents, at the same time, a value, a mercantile value appreciable and precise, which a practical man should estimate with a single glance, not through stinginess, but in order not to countenance fraud. What would you say if a tobacconist asked you four sous for a postage-stamp or for a box of wax-matches? You would go to look for a policeman, Monsieur, for one sou, yes, for one sou — so indignant would you be! And that because you knew, by chance, the value of these two articles. Well, as for me, I know the value of all salable articles; and that indignation which would take possession of you, if you were asked four sous for a postage-stamp, I experience when I am asked twenty francs for an umbrella which is worth fifteen! I protest against the established theft, ceaseless and abominable, of merchants, servants, and coachmen. I protest against the commercial dishonesty of all your race which despises us. I give the price of a drink which I am bound to give for a service rendered, and not that which as the result of a whim you fling away without knowing why, and which ranges from five to a hundred sous according to the caprice of your temper! Do you understand?"

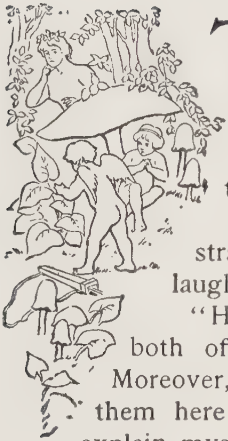
Gontran had risen by this time, and smiling with that refined irony which came happily from his lips:

"Yes, my dear fellow, I understand, and you are perfectly right, and so much the more right because my grandfather, the old Marquis de Ravenel, scarcely left anything to my poor father in consequence of the bad habit which he had of never picking up the change handed to him by the shopkeepers when he was paying for any article whatsoever. He thought that unworthy of a gentleman, and always gave the round sum and the entire coin."

And Gontran went out with a self-satisfied air.

CHAPTER XI.

A Mutual Understanding



THEY were just ready to go in to dinner, on the following day, in the private dining-room of the Andermatt and Ravenel families, when Gontran opened the door announcing the "Mesdemoiselles Oriol."

They entered, with an air of constraint, pushed forward by Gontran, who laughed while he explained:

"Here they are! I have carried them both off through the middle of the street. Moreover, it excited public attention. I brought them here by force to you because I want to explain myself to Madame Louise, and could not do so in the open air."

He took from them their hats and their parasols, which they were still carrying, as they had been on their way back from a promenade, made them sit down, embraced his sister, pressed the hands of his father, of his brother-in-law, and of Paul, and then, approaching Louise Oriol once more, said:

"Here now, Mademoiselle, kindly tell me what you have against me for some time past?"

She seemed scared, like a bird caught in a net, and carried away by the hunter.

"Why, nothing, Monsieur, nothing at all! What has made you believe that?"

"Oh! everything, Mademoiselle, everything at all! You no longer come here—you no longer come in the Noah's Ark [so he had baptized the big landau]. You assume a harsh tone whenever I meet you and when I speak to you."

"Why, no, Monsieur, I assure you!"

"Why, yes, Mam'zelle, I declare to you! In any case, I don't want this to continue, and I am going to make peace with you this very day. Oh! you know I am obstinate. There's no use in your looking black at me. I'll know easily how to get the better of your hoity-toity airs, and make you be nice toward your sister, who is an angel of grace."

It was announced that dinner was ready; and they made their way to the dining-room. Gontran took Louise's arm in his. He was exceedingly attentive to her and to her sister, dividing his compliments between them with admirable tact, and remarking to the younger girl: "As for you, you are a comrade of ours—I am going to neglect you for a few days. One goes to less expense for friends than for strangers, you are aware."

And he said to the elder: "As for you, I want to bewitch you, Mademoiselle, and I warn you as a loyal foe! I will even make love to you. Ha! you are blushing—that's a good sign. You'll see that I am very nice, when I take pains about it. Isn't that so, Mademoiselle Charlotte?"

And they were both, indeed, blushing, and Louise stammered with her serious air: "Oh! Monsieur, how foolish you are!"

He replied: "Bah! you will hear many things said by others by and by in society, when you are married, which will not be long. 'Tis then they will really pay you compliments."

Christiane and Paul Bretigny expressed their approval of his action in having brought back Louise Oriol; the Marquis smiled, amused by these childish affectations. Andermatt was thinking: "He's no fool, the sly dog." And Gontran, irritated by the part which he was compelled to play, drawn by his senses toward Charlotte and by his interests toward Louise, muttered between his teeth with a sly smile in her direction: "Ah! your rascal of a father thought to play a trick upon me; but I am going to carry it with a high hand over you, my lassie, and you will see whether I won't go about it the right way!"

And he compared the two, inspecting them one after the other. Certainly, he liked the younger more; she was more amusing, more lively, with her nose tilted slightly, her bright eyes, her straight forehead, and her beautiful teeth a little too prominent in a mouth which was somewhat too wide.

However, the other was pretty, too, colder, less gay. She would never be lively or charming in the intimate relations of life; but when at the opening of a ball "the Comtesse de Ravenel" would be announced, she could carry her title well — better perhaps than her younger sister, when she got a little accustomed to it, and had mingled with persons of high birth. No matter; he was annoyed. He was full of spite against the father and the brother also, and he promised himself that he would pay them off afterward for his mischance when he was the master. When they returned to the drawing-room, he got Louise to read the cards, as she was skilled in foretelling the future. The Marquis, Andermatt, and Charlotte listened attentively, attracted, in spite of themselves, by the mystery of the unknown, by the possibility of the improbable, by that invincible credulity with reference to the marvelous which haunts man, and often disturbs the strongest minds in the presence of the silly inventions of charlatans.

Paul and Christiane chatted in the recess of an open window. For some time past she had been miserable, feeling that she was no longer loved in the same fashion; and their misunderstanding as lovers was every day accentuated by their mutual error. She had suspected this unfortunate state of things for the first time on the evening of the *fête* when she brought Paul along the road. But while she understood that he had no longer the same tenderness in his look, the same caress in his voice, the same passionate anxiety about her as in the days of their early love, she had not been able to divine the cause of this change.

It had existed for a long time now, ever since the day when she had said to him with a look of happiness on reaching their daily meeting-place: "You know, I believe I am really *enceinte*." He had felt at that moment an unpleasant little shiver running all over his skin. Then at each of their meetings she would talk to him about her condition, which made

AFTER THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY FERDINAND BAC.

"Louise was skilled in foretelling the future."

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her heart dance with joy; but this preoccupation with a matter which he regarded as vexatious, ugly, and unclean clashed with his devoted exaltation about the idol that he had adored. At a later stage, when he saw her altered, thin, her cheeks hollow, her complexion yellow, he thought that she might have spared him that spectacle, and might have vanished for a few months from his sight, to reappear afterward fresher and prettier than ever, thus knowing how to make him forget this accident, or perhaps knowing how to unite to her coquettish fascinations as a mistress, another charm, the thoughtful reserve of a young mother, who only allows her baby to be seen at a distance covered up in red ribbons.

She had, besides, a rare opportunity of displaying that tact which he expected of her by spending the summer apart from him at Mont Oriol, and leaving him in Paris so that he might not see her robbed of her freshness and beauty. He had fondly hoped that she might have understood him.

But, immediately on reaching Auvergne, she had appealed to him in incessant and despairing letters so numerous and so urgent that he had come to her through weakness, through pity. And now she was boring him to death with her ungracious and lugubrious tenderness; and he felt an extreme longing to get away from her, to see no more of her, to listen no longer to her talk about love, so irritating and out of place. He would have liked to tell her plainly all that he had in his mind, to point out to her how unskillful and foolish she showed herself; but he could not bring himself to do this, and he dared not take his departure. As a result he could not restrain himself from testifying his impatience with her in bitter and hurtful words.

She was stung by them the more because, every day more ill, more heavy, tormented by all the sufferings of pregnant women, she had more need than ever of being consoled, fondled, encompassed with affection. She loved him with that utter abandonment of body and soul, of her entire being, which sometimes renders love a sacrifice without reservations and without bounds. She no longer looked upon herself as his mistress, but as his wife, his companion, his devotee, his worshiper, his prostrate slave, his chattel. For her there seemed no further need of any gallantry, coquetry, constant desire to please, or fresh indulgence between them, since she belonged to him entirely, since they were linked together by that chain so sweet and so strong — the child which would soon be born. When they were alone at the window, she renewed her tender lamentation: "Paul, my dear Paul, tell me, do you love me as much as ever?"

"Yes, certainly! Come now, you keep repeating this every day — it will end by becoming monotonous."

"Pardon me. It is because I find it impossible to believe it any longer, and I want you to reassure me; I want to hear you saying it to me forever that word which is so sweet; and, as you don't repeat it to me so often as you used to do, I am compelled to ask for it, to implore it, to beg for it from you."

"Well, yes, I love you! But let us talk of something else, I entreat of you."

"Ah! how hard you are!"

"Why, no! I am not hard. Only—only you do not understand—you do not understand that—"

"Oh! yes! I understand well that you no longer love me. If you knew how I am suffering!"

"Come, Christiane, I beg of you not to make me nervous. If you knew yourself how awkward what you are now doing is!"

"Ah! if you loved me, you would not talk to me in this way."

"But, deuce take it! if I did not love you, I would not have come."

"Listen. You belong to me now. You are mine; I am yours. There is between us that tie of a budding life which nothing can break; but will you promise me that, if one day, you should come to love me no more, you will tell me so?"

"Yes, I do promise you."

"You swear it to me?"

"I swear it to you."

"But then, all the same, we would remain friends, would we not?"

"Certainly, let us remain friends."

"On the day when you no longer regard me with love you'll come to find me and you'll say to me: 'My little Christiane, I am very fond of you, but it is not the same thing any more. Let us be friends, there! nothing but friends.'"

"That is understood; I promise it to you."

"You swear it to me?"

"I swear it to you."

"No matter, it would cause me great grief. How you adored me last year!"

A voice called out behind them: "The Duchess de Ramas-Aldavarra."

She had come as a neighbor, for Christiane held receptions each day for the principal bathers, just as princes hold receptions in their kingdoms.

Doctor Mazelli followed the lovely Spaniard with a smiling and submissive air. The two women pressed one another's hands, sat down, and commenced to chat.

Andermatt called Paul across to him: "My dear friend come here! Mademoiselle Oriol reads the cards splendidly; she has told me some astonishing things!"

He took Paul by the arm, and added: "What an odd being you are! At Paris, we never saw you, even once a month, in spite of the entreaties of my wife. Here it required fifteen letters to get you to come. And since you have come, one would think you are losing a million a day, you look so disconsolate. Come, are you hearing any matter that ruffles you? We might be able to assist you. You should tell us about it."

"Nothing at all, my dear fellow. If I haven't visited you more frequently in Paris—'tis because at Paris, you understand—"

"Perfectly—I grasp your meaning. But here, at least, you ought to be in good spirits. I am preparing for you two or three *fêtes*, which will, I am sure, be very successful."

"Madame Barre and Professor Cloche" were announced. He entered with his daughter, a young widow, red-haired and bold-faced. Then, almost in the same breath, the manservant called out: "Professor Mas-Roussel."

His wife accompanied him, pale, worn, with flat headbands drawn over her temples.

Professor Remusot had left the day before, after having, it was said, purchased his chalet on exceptionally favorable conditions.

The two other doctors would have liked to know what these conditions were, but Andermatt merely said in reply to them: "Oh! we have made little advantageous arrangements for everybody. If you desired to follow his example, we might see our way to a mutual understanding — we might see our way. When you have made up your mind, you can let me know, and then we'll talk about it."

Doctor Latonne appeared in his turn, then Doctor Honorat, without his wife, whom he did not bring with him. A din of voices now filled the drawing-room, the loud buzz of conversation. Gontran never left Louise Oriol's side, put his head over her shoulder in addressing her, and said with a laugh every now and again to whoever was passing near him: "This is an enemy of whom I am making a conquest."

Mazelli took a seat beside Professor Cloche's daughter. For some days he had been constantly following her about; and she had received his advances with provoking audacity.

The Duchess, who kept him well in view, appeared irritated and trembling. Suddenly she rose, crossed the drawing-room, and interrupted her doctor's confidential chat with the pretty red-haired widow, saying: "Come, Mazelli, we are going to retire. I feel rather ill at ease."

As soon as they had gone out, Christiane drew close to Paul's side, and said to him: "Poor woman! she must suffer so much!"

He asked heedlessly: "Who, pray?"

"The Duchess! You don't see how jealous she is."

He replied abruptly: "If you begin to groan over everything you can lay hold of now, you'll have no end of weeping."

She turned away, ready, indeed, to shed tears, so cruel did she find him, and, sitting down near Charlotte Oriol, who was all alone in a dazed condition, unable to comprehend the meaning of Gontran's conduct, she said to the young girl, without letting the latter realize what her words conveyed: "There are days when one would like to be dead."

Andermatt, in the midst of the doctors, was relating the extraordinary case of Père Clovis, whose legs were beginning to come to life again. He appeared so thoroughly convinced that nobody could doubt his good faith.

Since he had seen through the trick of the peasants and the paralytic, understood that he had let himself be duped and persuaded, the year before, through the sheer desire to believe in the efficacy of the waters with which he had been bitten, since, above all, he had not been able to free himself, without paying, from the formidable complaints of the old man, he had converted it into a strong advertisement, and worked it wonderfully well.

Mazelli had just come back, after having accompanied his patient to her own apartments.

Gontran caught hold of his arm: "Tell me your opinion, my good doctor. Which of the Oriol girls do you prefer?"

The handsome physician whispered in his ear: "The younger one, to love; the elder one, to marry."

"Look at that! We are exactly of the same way of thinking. I am delighted at it!"

Then, going over to his sister, who was still talking to Charlotte: "You are not aware of it? I have made up my mind that we are to visit the Puy de la Nugère on Thursday. It is the finest crater of the chain. Everyone consents. It is a settled thing."

Christiane murmured with an air of indifference: "I consent to anything you like."

But Professor Cloche, followed by his daughter, was about to take his leave, and Mazelli, offering to see them home, started off behind the young widow. In five minutes, everyone had left, for Christiane went to bed at eleven o'clock. The Marquis, Paul, and Gontran accompanied the Oriol girls. Gontran and Louise walked in front, and Bretigny, some paces behind them, felt Charlotte's arm trembling a little as it leaned on his.

They separated with the agreement: "On Thursday at eleven for breakfast at the hotel!"

On their way back they met Andermatt, detained in a corner of the park by Professor Mas-Roussel, who was saying to him: "Well, if it does not put you about, I'll come and have a chat with you to-morrow morning about that little business of the chalet."

William joined the young men to go in with them, and, drawing himself up to his brother-in-law's ear, said: "My best compliments, my dear boy! You have acted your part admirably."

Gontran, for the past two years, had been harassed by pecuniary embarrassments which had spoiled his existence. So long as he was spending the share which came to him from his mother, he had allowed his life to pass in that carelessness and indifference which he inherited from his father, in the midst of those young men, rich, *blasé,* and corrupted, whose doings we read about every morning in the newspapers, who belong to the world of fashion but mingle in it very little, preferring the society of women of easy virtue and purchasable hearts.

There were a dozen of them in the same set, who were to be found every night at the same *café* on the boulevard between midnight and three o'clock in the morning. Very well dressed, always in black coats and white waistcoats, wearing shirt-buttons worth twenty louis changed every month, and bought in one of the principal jewelers' shops, they lived careless of everything, save amusing themselves, picking up women, making them a subject of talk, and getting money by every possible means.

As the only things they had any knowledge of were the scandals of the night before, the echoes of alcoves and stables, duels and stories about gambling transactions, the entire horizon of their thoughts was shut in by these barriers. They had had all the women who were for sale in the market of gallantry, had passed them through their hands, given them up, exchanged them with one another, and talked among themselves as to their erotic qualities as they might have talked about the qualities of race-horses. They also associated with people of rank whose voluptuous habits excited comment and whose women nearly all kept up intrigues which were matters of notoriety, under the eyes of husbands indifferent or averted or closed or devoid of perception; and they passed judgment on these women as on the others, forming much the same estimate about them, save that they made a slight distinction on the grounds of birth and social position.

By dint of resorting to dodges to get the money necessary for the life which they led, outwitting usurers, borrowing on all sides, putting off tradesmen, laughing in the faces of their tailors when presented with a big bill every six months, listening to girls telling about the infamies they perpetrated in order to gratify their feminine greed, seeing systematic cheating at clubs, knowing and feeling that they were individually robbed by everyone, by servants, merchants, keepers of big restaurants and others, becoming acquainted with certain sharp practices and shady transactions in which they themselves had a hand in order to knock out a few louis, their moral sense had become blunted, used up, and their sole point of honor consisted in fighting duels when they realized that they were suspected of all the things of which they were either capable or actually guilty.

Everyone of these young *roués*, after some years of this existence, ended with a rich marriage, or a scandal, or a suicide, or a mysterious disappearance as complete as death. But they put their principal reliance on the rich marriage. Some trusted to their families to procure such a thing for them; others looked out themselves for it without letting it be noticed; and they had lists of heiresses just as people have lists of houses for sale. They kept their eyes fixed especially on the exotics, the Americans of the north and of the south, whom they dazzled by their "chic," by their reputation as fast men, by talk about their successes, and by the elegance of their persons. And their tradesmen also placed reliance on the rich marriage.

But this hunt after the girl with a fortune was bound to be protracted. In any case it involved inquiries, the trouble of winning a female heart, fatigues, visits, all that exercise of energy of which Gontran, careless by nature, remained utterly incapable. For a long time past, he had been saying to himself, feeling each day more keenly the unpleasantness of impecuniosity: "I must, for all that, think over it." But he did not think over it, and so he found nothing. He had been reduced to the ingenious pursuit of paltry sums, to all the questionable steps of people at the end of their resources, and, to crown all, to long sojourns in the family, when Andermatt had suddenly suggested to him the idea of marrying one of the Oriol girls.

He had, at first, said nothing through prudence, although the young girl appeared to him, at first blush, too much beneath him for him to consent to such an unequal match. But a few minutes' reflection had very speedily modified his view; and he forthwith made up his mind to make love to her in a bantering sort of way—the love-making of a spa—which would not compromise him, and would permit him to back out of it.

Thoroughly acquainted with his brother-in-law's character, he knew that this proposition must have been cogitated for a long time, and weighed and matured by him—that she meant to him a valuable prize such as it would be hard to find elsewhere.

It would cost him no trouble but that of stooping down and picking up a pretty girl, for he liked the younger sister very much, and he had often said to himself that she would be nice to associate with later on. He had accordingly selected Charlotte Oriol; and in a little time would have brought matters to the point when a regular proposal might have been made to her.

Now, as the father was bestowing on his other daughter the dowry coveted by Andermatt, Gontran had either to renounce this union or turn round to the elder sister. He felt intense dissatisfaction with this state of affairs and he had been thinking in his first moments of vexation of sending his brother-in-law to the devil and remaining a bachelor until a fresh opportunity arose. But just at that very time he found himself quite cleaned out, so that he had to ask, for his play at the Casino, a sum of twenty-five louis from Paul, after many similar loans, which he had never paid back. And again, he would have to look for a rich wife, find her, and captivate her, while without any change of place, with only a few days of attention and gallantry, he could capture the elder of the Oriol girls just as he had been able to make a conquest of the younger. In this way he would make sure in his brother-in-law of a banker whom he might render always responsible, on whom he might cast endless reproaches, and whose cash-box would always be open for him.

As for his wife, he could bring her to Paris, and there introduce her into society as the daughter of Andermatt's partner. Moreover, she bore the name of the spa, to which he would never bring her back!

Never! never! in virtue of the natural law that streams do not return to their sources. She had a nice face and figure, sufficiently distinguished already to become entirely so, sufficiently intelligent to understand the ways of society, to hold her own in it, to make a good show in it, and even to do him honor. People would say: "This joker here has married a lovely girl, at whom he looks as if he were not making a bad joke of it." And he would not make a bad joke of it, in fact, for he counted on resuming by her side his bachelor existence with the money in his pockets.

So he turned toward Louise Oriol, and, taking advantage of the jealousy awakened in the skittish heart of the young girl, without being aware of it, had excited in her a coquetry which had hitherto slumbered, and a vague desire to take away from her sister this handsome lover whom people addressed as "Monsieur le Comte."

She had not said this in her own mind. She had neither thought it out nor contrived it, being surprised at their being thrown together and going off in one another's company. But when she saw him assiduous and gallant toward her, she felt from his demeanor, from his glances, and his entire attitude, that he was not enamored of Charlotte, and without trying to see beyond that, she was in a happy, joyous, almost triumphant frame of mind as she lay down to sleep.

They hesitated for a long time on the following Thursday before starting for the Puy de la Nugère. The gloomy sky and the heavy atmosphere made them anticipate rain. But Gontran insisted so strongly on going that he carried the waverers along with him. The breakfast was a melancholy affair. Christiane and Paul had quarreled the night before, without apparent cause. Andermatt was afraid that Gontran's marriage might not take place, for Père Oriol had, that very morning, spoken of him in equivocal terms. Gontran, on being informed of this, got angry and made up his mind that he would succeed. Charlotte, foreseeing her sister's triumph, without at all understanding this transfer of Gontran's affections, strongly desired to remain in the village. With some difficulty they prevailed on her to come.

Accordingly the Noah's Ark carried its full number of ordinary passengers in the direction of the high plateau which looks down on Volvic. Louise Oriol, suddenly becoming loquacious, acted as their guide along the road. She explained how the stone of Volvic, which is nothing else but the lava-current of the surrounding peaks, had helped to build all the churches and all the houses in the district — a circumstance which gives to the towns in Auvergne the dark and charred-looking aspect that they present.

She pointed out the yards where this stone was cut, showed them the molten rock that was worked as a quarry, from which was extracted the rough lava, and made them view with admiration, standing on a hilltop and bending over Volvic, the immense black Virgin who protects the town. Then they ascended toward the upper plateau, embossed with extinct volcanoes. The horses went at a walking pace over the long and toilsome road. Their path was bordered with beautiful green woods, and nobody talked any longer.

Christiane was thinking about Tazenat. It was the same carriage; they were the same persons; but their hearts were no longer the same. Everything seemed as it had been — and yet? and yet? What then had happened? Almost nothing. A little love the more on her part! A little love the less on his! Almost nothing — the invisible rent which weariness makes in an intimate attachment — oh! almost nothing — and the look in the changed eyes, because the same eyes no longer saw the same faces in the same way. What is this but a look? Almost nothing!

The coachman drew up, and said: "It is here, at the right, through that path in the wood. You have only to follow it in order to get there.

All descended, save the Marquis, who thought the weather too warm. Louise and Gontran went on in front, and Charlotte remained behind with Paul and Christiane, who found difficulty in walking. The path appeared to them long, right through the wood; then they reached a crest covered with tall grass which led by a steep ascent to the sides of the old crater. Louise and Gontran, halting when they got to the top, both looking tall and slender, had the appearance of standing in the clouds. When the others had come up with them, Paul Bretigny's enthusiastic soul was inflamed with poetic rapture.

Around them, behind them, to right, to left, they were surrounded by strange cones, decapitated, some shooting forth, others crushed into a mass, but all preserving their fantastic physiognomy of dead volcanoes. These heavy fragments of mountains with flat summits rose from south to west along an immense plateau of desolate appearance, which, itself a thousand meters above the Limagne, looked down upon it, as far as the eye could reach, toward the east and the north, on to the invisible horizon, always veiled, always blue.

The Puy de Dome, at the right, towered above all its fellows, with from seventy to eighty craters now gone to sleep. Further on were the Puy de Gravenoire, the Puy de Crouel, the Puy de la Pedge, the Puy de Sault, the Puy de Noschamps, the Puy de la Vache. Nearer, were the Puy de Come, the Puy de Jumes, the Puy de Tressoux, the Puy de Louchadière—a vast cemetery of volcanoes.

The young men gazed at the scene in amazement. At their feet opened the first crater of La Nugère, a deep grassy basin at the bottom of which could be seen three enormous blocks of brown lava, lifted up with the monster's last puff and then sunk once more into his throat as he expired, remaining there from century to century forever.

Gontran exclaimed: "As for me, I am going down to the bottom. I want to see how they give up the ghost—creatures of this sort. Come along, Mesdemoiselles, for a little run down the slope." And seizing Louise's arm, he dragged her after him. Charlotte followed them, running after them. Then, all of a sudden, she stopped, watched them as they flew along, jumping with their arms linked, and, turning back abruptly, she reascended toward Christiane and Paul, who were seated on the grass at the top of the declivity. When she reached them, she fell upon her knees, and, hiding her face in the young girl's robe she wore, she burst out sobbing.

Christiane, who understood what was the matter, and whom all the sorrows of others had, for some time past, pierced like wounds inflicted upon herself, flung her arms around the girl's neck, and, moved also by her tears, murmured: "Poor little thing! poor little thing!" The girl kept crying incessantly, and with her hands dropping listlessly to the ground, she tore up the grass unconscious of what she was doing.

Bretigny had risen up in order to avoid the appearance of having observed her, but this misery endured by a young girl, this distress of an innocent creature, filled him suddenly with indignation against Gontran. He, whom Christiane's deep anguish only exasperated, was touched to the bottom of his heart by a girl's first disillusion.

He came back, and kneeling down in his turn, in order to speak to her, said: "Come, calm yourself, I beg of you. They are going to return presently. They must not see you crying."

She sprang to her feet, scared by this idea that her sister might find her with tears in her eyes. Her throat remained choking with sobs, which she held back, which she swallowed down, which she sent back into her heart, filling it with more poignant grief. She faltered: "Yes—yes—it is over—it is nothing—it is over. Look here! It cannot be noticed now. Isn't that so? It cannot be noticed now."

Christiane wiped her cheeks with her handkerchief, then passed it also across her own. She said to Paul:

"Go, pray, and see what they are doing. We cannot see them any longer. They have disappeared under the blocks of lava. I will look after this little one, and console her."

Bretigny had again stood up, and in a trembling voice, said: "I am going there—and I'll bring them back, but it will be my affair—your brother—this very day—and he shall give me an explanation of his unjustifiable conduct, after what he said to us the other day." He began to descend, running toward the center of the crater.

Gontran, hurrying Louise along, had pulled her with all his strength over the steep side of the chasm, in order to hold her up, to sustain her, to put her out of breath, to make her dizzy, and to frighten her. She, carried along by his wild rush, attempted to stop him, gasping: "Oh! not so quickly—I'm going to fall—why, you're mad—I'm going to fall!"

They knocked against the blocks of lava, and remained standing up, both breathless. Then they walked round the crater staring at the big gaps which formed below a kind of cavern, with a double outlet.

When at the end of its life, the volcano had cast out this last mouthful of foam, unable to shoot it up to the sky as in former times, he had spat it forth, so that, thick and half-cooled, it fixed itself upon his dying lips.

"We must enter under there," said Gontran. And he pushed the young girl before him. Then, when they were in the grotto, he said: "Well, Mademoiselle, this is the moment to make a declaration to you."

She was stupefied: "A declaration—to me!"

"Why, yes, in four words—I find you charming!"

"It is to my sister you should say that!"

"Oh! you know well that I am not making a declaration to your sister."

"Come, now!"

"Look here! you would not be a woman if you did not understand that I have paid attentions to her to see what you would think of it!—and what looks you gave me on account of it. Why, you looked daggers at me! Oh! I'm quite satisfied. So then I have tried to prove to you, by all the consideration in my power, how much I thought about you."

Nobody had ever before talked to her in this way. She felt confused and delighted, her heart full of joy and pride. He went on: "I know well that I have been nasty toward your little sister. So much the worse. She is not deceived by it, never fear. You see how she remained on the hillside, how she was not inclined to follow us. Oh! she understands! she understands!"

He had caught hold of one of Louise Oriol's hands, and he kissed the ends of her fingers softly, gallantly, murmuring: "How nice you are! How nice you are!"

She, leaning against the wall of lava, heard his heart beating with emotion without uttering a word. The thought, the sole thought, which floated in her agitated mind, was one of triumph; she had got the better of her sister! But a shadow appeared at the entrance to the grotto. Paul Bretigny was looking at them. Gontran, in a natural fashion, let fall the little hand which he had been raising to his lips, and said: "Hallo! you here? Are you alone?"

"Yes. We were surprised to see you disappearing down here."

"Oh! well, let us go back. We were looking at this. Isn't it rather curious?"

Louise, flushed up to her temples, went out first, and began to reascend the slope, followed by the two young men, who were talking behind in a low tone.

Christiane and Charlotte saw them approaching, and awaited them with clasped hands.

They went back to the carriage in which the Marquis had remained, and the Noah's Ark set out again for Enval.

Suddenly, in the midst of a little forest of pine-trees the landau stopped, and the coachman began to swear. An old dead ass blocked the way.

Everyone wanted to look at it, and they got down off the carriage. He lay stretched on the blackened dust, himself discolored, and so lean that his worn skin at the places where the bones projected seemed as if it would have been burst through if the animal had not breathed forth his last sigh. The entire carcass outlined itself under the gnawed hair of his sides, and his head looked enormous — a poor-looking head, with the eyes closed, tranquil now on its bed of broken stones, so tranquil, so calm in death, that it appeared happy and surprised at this new-found rest. His big ears, now relaxed, lay like rags. Two raw wounds on his knees told how often he had fallen that very day before sinking down for the last time; and another wound on the side showed the place where his master, for years and years, had been pricking him with an iron spike attached to the end of a stick, to hasten his slow pace.

The coachman, having caught its hind legs, dragged it toward a ditch, and the neck was strained as if the dead brute were going to bray once more, to give vent to a last complaint. When this was done, the man, in a rage, muttered: "What brutes, to leave this in the middle of the road!"

No other person had said a word; they again stepped into the carriage. Christiane, heartbroken, crushed, saw all the miserable life of this animal ended thus at the side of the road: the merry little donkey with his big head, in which glittered a pair of big eyes, comical and good-tempered, with his rough hair and his long ears, gamboling about, still free, close to his mother's legs; then the first cart; the first uphill journey; the first blows; and, after that, the ceaseless and terrible walking along interminable roads, the overpowering heat of the sun, and nothing for food save a little straw, a little hay, or some branches, while all along the hard roads there was the temptation of the green meadows.

And then, again, as age came upon him, the iron spike replacing the pliant switch; and the frightful martyrdom of the animal, worn out, bereft of breath, bruised, always dragging after it excessive loads, and suffering in all its limbs, in all its old body, shabby as a beggar's cart. And then the death, the beneficent death, three paces away from the grass of the ditch, to which a man, passing by, drags it with oaths, in order to clear the road.

Christiane, for the first time, understood the wretchedness of enslaved creatures; and death appeared to her also a very good thing at times.

Suddenly they passed by a little cart, which a man nearly naked, a woman in tatters, and a lean dog were dragging along, exhausted by fatigue. The occupants of the carriage noticed that they were sweating and panting. The dog, with his tongue out, fleshless and mangy, was fastened between the wheels. There were in this cart pieces of wood picked up everywhere, stolen, no doubt, roots, stumps, broken branches, which seemed to hide other things; then over these branches rags, and on these rags a child, nothing but a head starting out through gray old scraps of cloth, a round ball with two eyes, a nose, and a mouth!

This was a family, a human family! The ass had succumbed to fatigue, and the man, without pity for his dead servant, without pushing it even into the rut, had left it in the open road, in front of any vehicles which might be coming up. Then, yoking himself in his turn with his wife in the empty shafts, they proceeded to drag it along as the beast had dragged it a short time before. They were going on. Where? To do what? Had they even a few sous? That cart—would they be dragging it forever, not being in a position to buy another animal? What would they live on? Where would they stop? They would probably die as their donkey had died.

Were they married, these beggars, or merely living together? And their child would do the same as they did, this little brute as yet unformed, concealed under sordid wrappings. Christiane was thinking on all these things; and new sensations rose up in the depths of her pitying soul. She had a glimpse of the misery of the poor.

Gontran said, all of a sudden: "I don't know why, but I would think it a delicious thing if we were all to dine together this evening at the Café

Anglais. It would give me pleasure to have a look at the boulevard."

And the Marquis muttered: "Bah! we are well enough here. The new hotel is much better than the old one."

They passed in front of Tournoel. A recollection of the spot made Christiane's heart palpitate, as she recognized a certain chestnut-tree. She glanced toward Paul, who had closed his eyes, so that he did not see her meek, appealing face.

Soon they perceived two men before the carriage, two vinedressers returning from work carrying their rakes on their shoulders, and walking with the long, weary steps of laborers. The Oriol girls reddened to their very temples. It was their father and their brother, who had gone back to their vine-lands as in former times, and passed their days sweating over the soil which they had enriched, and bent double, with their buttocks in the air, kept toiling at it from morning until evening, while the fine frock-coats, carefully folded up, were at rest in the chest of drawers, and the tall hats in a press.

The two peasants bowed with a friendly smile, while everyone in the landau waved a hand in response to their "Good evening."

When they got back, just as Gontran was stepping out of the Ark to go up to the Casino, Bretigny accompanied him, and stopping on the first steps, said:

"Listen, my friend! What you're doing is not right, and I've promised your sister to speak to you about it."

"To speak about what?"

"About the way you have been acting during the last few days."

Gontran had resumed his impertinent air.

"Acting? Toward whom?"

"Toward this girl whom you are meanly jilting."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I do think so—and I am right in thinking so."

"Bah! you are becoming very scrupulous on the subject of jilting."

"Ah, my friend, 'tis not a question of a loose woman here, but of a young girl."

"I know that perfectly; therefore, I have not seduced her. The difference is very marked."

They went on walking together side by side. Gontran's demeanor exasperated Paul, who replied:

"If I were not your friend, I would say some very severe things to you."

"And for my part I would not permit you to say them."

"Look here, listen to me, my friend! This young girl excites my pity. She was weeping a little while ago."

"Bah! she was weeping! Why, that's a compliment to me!"

"Come, don't trifle! What do you mean to do?"

"I? Nothing!"

"Just consider! You have gone so far with her that you have compromised her. The other day you told your sister and me that you were thinking of marrying her."

Gontran stopped in his walk, and in that mocking tone through which a menace showed itself:

"My sister and you would do better not to bother yourselves about other people's love affairs. I told you that this girl pleases me well enough, and that if I happened to marry her, I would be doing a wise and reasonable act. That's all. Now it turns out that to-day I like the elder girl better. I have changed my mind. That's a thing that happens to everyone."

Then, looking him full in the face: "What is it that you do yourself when you cease to care about a woman? Do you look after her?"

Paul Bretigny, astonished, sought to penetrate the profound meaning, the hidden sense, of these words. A little feverishness also mounted into his brain. He said in a violent tone:

"I tell you again this is not a question of a hussy or a married woman, but of a young girl whom you have deceived, if not by promises, at least by your advances. That is not, mark you, the part of a man of honor!—or of an honest man!"

Gontran, pale, his voice quivering, interrupted him: "Hold your tongue! You have already said too much—and I have listened to too much of this. In my turn, if I were not your friend I—I might show you that I have a short temper. Another word, and there is an end of everything between us forever!"

Then, slowly weighing his words, and flinging them in Paul's face, he said: "I have no explanations to offer you—I might rather have to demand them from you. There is a certain kind of indelicacy of which it is not the part of a man of honor or of an honest man to be guilty—which might take many forms—from which friendship ought to keep certain people—and which love does not excuse."

All of a sudden, changing his tone, and almost jesting, he added:

"As for this little Charlotte, if she excites your pity, and if you like her, take her, and marry her. Marriage is often a solution of difficult cases. It is a solution, and a stronghold, in which one may barricade himself against desperate obstacles. She is pretty and rich! It would be very desirable for you to finish with an accident like this!—it would be amusing for us to marry here, the same day, for I certainly will marry the elder one. I tell it to you as a secret, and don't repeat it as yet. Now don't forget that you have less right than anyone else yourself ever to talk about integrity in matters of sentiment, and scruples of affection. And now go and look after your own affairs. I am going to look after mine. Good night!"

And suddenly turning off in another direction, he went down toward the village. Paul Bretigny, with doubts in his mind and uneasiness in his heart, returned with lingering steps to the hotel of Mont Oriol.

He tried to understand thoroughly, to recall each word, in order to determine its meaning, and he was amazed at the secret byways, shameful and unfit to be spoken of, which may be hidden in certain souls.

When Christiane asked him: "What reply did you get from Gontran?"

He faltered: "My God! he—he prefers the elder, just now. I believe he even intends to marry her—and in answer to my rather sharp reproaches he shut my mouth by allusions that are—disquieting to both of us."

Christiane sank into a chair, murmuring: "Oh! my God! my God!"

But, as Gontran had just come in, for the bell had rung for dinner, he kissed her gaily on the forehead, asking: "Well, little sister, how do you feel now? You are not too tired?"

Then he pressed Paul's hand, and, turning toward Andermatt, who had come in after him:

"I say, pearl of brothers-in-law, of husbands, and of friends, can you tell me exactly what an old ass dead on a road is worth?"

CHAPTER XII.

A Betrothal

ANDERMATT and Doctor Latonne were walking in front of the Casino on a terrace adorned with vases made of imitation marble.

"He no longer salutes me," the doctor was saying, referring to his brother-physician Bonnefille. "He is over there in his pit, like a wild-boar. I believe he would poison our springs, if he could!"

Andermatt, with his hands behind his back and his hat — a small round hat of gray felt — thrown back over his neck, so as to let the baldness above his forehead be seen, was deeply plunged in thought. At length he said:

"Oh! in three months the Company will have knuckled under. We might buy it over at ten thousand francs. It is that wretched Bonnefille who is exciting them against me, and who makes them fancy that I will give way. But he is mistaken."

The new inspector returned: "You are aware that they have shut up their Casino since yesterday. They have no one any longer."

"Yes, I am aware of it; but we have not enough of people here ourselves. They stick in too much at the hotels; and people get bored in the hotels, my dear fellow. It is necessary to amuse the bathers, to distract them, to make them think the season too short. Those staying at our Mont Oriol hotel come every evening, because they are quite near, but the others hesitate and remain in their abodes. It is a question of routes — nothing else. Success always depends on certain imperceptible causes which we ought to know how to discover. It is necessary that the routes leading to a place of recreation should be a source of recreation in themselves, the commencement of the pleasure which one will be enjoying presently.

"The ways which lead to this place are bad, stony, hard; they cause fatigue. When a route which goes to any place, to which one has a vague desire of paying a visit, is pleasant, wide, and full of shade in the daytime, easy and not too steep at night, one selects it naturally in preference to others. If you knew how the body preserves the recollection of a thousand things which the mind has not taken the trouble to retain! I believe this is how the memory of animals is constructed. Have you felt too hot when repairing to such a place? Have you tired your feet on badly broken stones? Have you found an ascent too rough, even while you were thinking of something else? If so, you will experience invincible repugnance to revisiting that spot. You were chatting with a friend; you took no notice of the slight annoyances of the journey; you were looking at nothing, remarking notice; but your legs, your muscles, your lungs, your whole body have not forgotten, and they say to the mind, when it wants to take them along the same route: 'No, I won't go; I have suffered too much there.' And the mind yields to this refusal without disputing it, submitting to this mute language of the companions who carry it along.

"So then, we want fine pathways, which comes back to saying that I require the bits of ground belonging to that donkey of a Père Oriol. But patience! Ha! with reference to that point, Mas-Roussel has become the proprietor of his own chalet on the same conditions as Remusot. It is a trifling sacrifice for which he will amply indemnify us. Try, therefore, to find out exactly what are Cloche's intentions."

"He'll do just the same thing as the others," said the physician. "But there is something else, of which I have been thinking for the last few days, and which we have completely forgotten — it is the meteorological bulletin."

"What meteorological bulletin?"

"In the big Parisian newspapers. It is indispensable, this is! It is necessary that the temperature of a thermal station should be better, less variable, more uniformly mild than that of the neighboring and rival stations. You subscribe to the meteorological bulletin in the leading organs of opinion, and I will send every evening by telegraph the atmospheric situation. I will do it in such a way that the average arrived at when the year is at an end may be higher than the best mean temperatures of the surrounding stations. The first thing that meets our eyes when we open the big newspapers are the temperatures of Vichy, of Royat, of Mont Doré, of Chatel-Guyon, and other places during the summer season, and, during the winter season, the temperatures of Cannes, Mentone, Nice, Saint Raphael. It is necessary that the weather should always be hot and always fine in these places, in order that the Parisian might say: 'Christi! how lucky the people are who go down there!'"

Andermatt exclaimed: "Upon my honor, you're right. Why have I never thought of that? I will attend to it this very day. With regard to useful things, have you written to Professors Larenard and Pascalis? There are two men I would like very much to have here."

"Unapproachable, my dear President—unless—unless they are satisfied of themselves after many trials that our waters are of a superior character. But, as far as they are concerned, you will accomplish nothing by persuasion—by anticipation."

They passed by Paul and Gontran, who had come to take coffee after luncheon. Other bathers made their appearance, especially men, for the women, on rising from the table, always went up to their rooms for an hour or two. Petrus Martel was looking after his waiters, and crying out: "A kummel, a nip of brandy, a glass of aniseed cordial," in the same rolling, deep voice which he would assume an hour later while conducting rehearsals, and giving the keynote to the young *première.*

Andermatt stopped a few moments for a short chat with the two young men; then he resumed his promenade by the side of the inspector.

Gontran, with legs crossed and folded arms, lolling in his chair, with the nape of his neck against the back of it, and his eyes and his cigar facing the sky, was puffing in a state of absolute contentment.

Suddenly, he asked: "Would you mind taking a turn, presently, in the valley of Sans-Souci? The girls will be there."

Paul hesitated; then, after some reflection: "Yes, I am quite willing." Then he added: "Is your affair progressing?"

"Egad, it is! Oh! I have a hold of her. She won't escape me now."

Gontran had, by this time, taken his friend into his confidence, and told him, day by day, how he was going on and how much ground he had gained. He even got him to be present, as a confederate, at his appointments, for he had managed to obtain appointments with Louise Oriol by a little bit of ingenuity.

After their promenade at the Puy de la Nugère, Christiane put an end to these excursions by not going out at all, and so rendered it more and more difficult for the lovers to meet. Her brother, put out at first by this attitude on her part, bethought him of some means of extricating himself from this predicament. Accustomed to Parisian morals, according to which women are regarded by men of his stamp as game, the chase of which is often no easy one, he had in former days made use of many artifices in order to gain access to those for whom he had conceived a passion. He knew better than anyone else how to make use of pimps, to discover those who were accommodating through interested motives, and to determine with a single glance the men or women who were disposed to aid him in his designs.

The unconscious support of Christiane having suddenly been withdrawn from him, he had looked about him for the requisite connecting link, the "pliant nature," as he expressed it himself, whereby he could replace his sister; and his choice speedily fixed itself on Doctor Honorat's wife. Many reasons pointed at her as a suitable person. In the first place, her husband, closely associated with the Oriols, had been for the past twenty years attending this family. He had been present at the birth of the children, had dined with them every Sunday, and had entertained them at his own table every Tuesday. His wife, a fat old woman of the lower-middle class, trying to pass as a lady, full of pretension, easy to overcome through her vanity, was sure to lend both hands to every desire of the Comte de Ravenel, whose brother-in-law owned the establishment of Mont Oriol.

Besides, Gontran, who was a good judge of a go-between, had satisfied himself that this woman was naturally well adapted for the part, by merely seeing her walking through the street.

"She has the physique," was his reflection, "and when one has the physique for an employment, one has the soul required for it, too!"

Accordingly, he made his way into her abode, one day, after having accompanied her husband to his own door. He sat down, chatted, complimented the lady, and, when the dinner-bell rang, he said, as he rose up: "You have a very savory smell here. You cook better than they do at the hotel."

Madame Honorat, swelling with pride, faltered: "Good heavens! if I might make so bold—if I might make so bold, Monsieur le Comte, as—"

"If you might make so bold as what, dear Madame?"

"As to ask you to share our humble meal."

"Faith — faith, I would say 'yes.'"

The doctor, ill at ease, muttered: "But we have nothing, nothing — soup, a joint of beef, and a chicken, that's all!"

Gontran laughed: "That's quite enough for me. I accept the invitation."

And he dined at the Honorat household. The fat woman rose up, went to take the dishes out of the servant-maid's hands, in order that the latter might not spill the sauce over the tablecloth, and, in spite of her husband's impatience, insisted on attending at table herself.

The Comte congratulated her on the excellence of the cooking, on the good house she kept, on her attention to the duties of hospitality, and he left her inflamed with enthusiasm.

He returned to leave his card, accepted a fresh invitation, and thenceforth made his way constantly to Madame Honorat's house, to which the Oriol girls had paid visits frequently also for many years as neighbors and friends.

So then he spent hours there, in the midst of the three ladies, attentive to both sisters, but accentuating clearly, from day to day, his marked preference for Louise.

The jealousy that had sprung up between the girls since the time when he had begun to make love to Charlotte had assumed an aspect of spiteful hostility on the side of the elder girl and of disdain on the side of the younger. Louise, with her reserved air, imported into her reticences and her demure ways in Gontran's society much more coquetry and encouragement than the other had formerly shown with all her free and joyous unconstraint. Charlotte, wounded to the quick, concealed through pride the pain that she endured, pretended not to see or hear anything of what was happening around her, and continued her visits to Madame Honorat's house with a beautiful appearance of indifference to all these lovers' meetings. She would not remain behind at her own abode lest people might think that her heart was sore, that she was weeping, that she was making way for her sister.

Gontran, too proud of his achievement to throw a veil over it, could not keep himself from talking about it to Paul. And Paul, thinking it amusing, began to laugh. He had, besides, since the first equivocal remarks of his friend, resolved not to interfere in his affairs, and he often asked himself with uneasiness: "Can it be possible that he knows something about Christiane and me?"

He knew Gontran too well not to believe him capable of shutting his eyes to an intrigue on the part of his sister. But then, why did he not let it be understood sooner that he guessed it or was aware of it? Gontran was, in fact, one of those in whose opinion every woman in society ought to have a lover or lovers, one of those for whom the family is merely a society of mutual help, for whom morality is an attitude that is indispensable in order to veil the different appetites which nature has implanted in us, and for whom worldly honor is a front behind which amiable vices should be hidden. Moreover, if he had egged on his dear sister to marry Andermatt was it not with the vague, if not clearly-defined, idea that this Jew might be utilized, in every way, by all the family?—and he would probably have despised Christiane for being faithful to this husband of convenience, of utility, just as much as he would have despised himself for not borrowing freely from his brother-in-law's purse.

Paul pondered over all this, and it disturbed his modern Don Quixote's soul, which, in any event, was disposed toward compromise. He had, therefore, become very reserved with this enigmatic friend of his. When, accordingly, Gontran told him the use that he was making of Madame Honorat, Bretigny burst out laughing; and he had even, for some time past, allowed himself to be brought to that lady's house, and found great pleasure in chatting with Charlotte there.

The doctor's wife lent herself, with the best grace in the world, to the part she was made to play, and offered them tea about five o'clock, like the Parisian ladies, with little cakes manufactured by her own hands. On the first occasion when Paul made his way into this household, she welcomed him as if he were an old friend, made him sit down, removed his hat herself, in spite of his protests, and placed it beside the clock upon the mantelpiece. Then, eager, bustling, going from one to the other, tremendously big and fat, she asked:

"Do you feel inclined for a little dinner?"

Gontran told funny stories, joked, and laughed quite at his ease. Then, he took Louise into the recess of a window under the troubled eyes of Charlotte.

Madame Honorat, who sat chatting with Paul, said to him in a maternal tone:

"These dear children, they come here to have a few minutes' conversation with one another. 'Tis very innocent—isn't it, Monsieur Bretigny?"

"Oh! very innocent, Madame!"

When he came the next time, she familiarly addressed him as "Monsieur Paul," treating him more or less as a crony.

And from that time forth, Gontran told him, with a sort of teasing liveliness, all about the complaisant behavior of the doctor's wife, to whom he had said, the evening before: "Why do you never go out for a walk along the Sans-Souci road?"

"But we will go, M. le Comte—we will go."

"Say, to-morrow about three o'clock."

"To-morrow, about three o'clock, M. le Comte."

And Gontran explained to Paul: "You understand that in this drawing-room, I cannot say anything of a very confidential nature to the elder girl before the younger. But in the wood I can go on before or remain behind with Louise. So then you will come?"

"Yes, I have no objection."

"Let us go on then."

And they rose up, and set forth at a leisurely pace along the highroad; then, having passed through La Roche Pradière, they turned to the left and descended into the wooded glen in the midst of tangled brushwood. When they had passed the little river, they sat down at the side of the path and waited.

The three ladies soon arrived, walking in single file, Louise in front, and Madame Honorat in the rear.

They exhibited surprise on both sides at having met in this way. Gontran exclaimed: "Well, now, what a good idea this was of yours to come along here!"

The doctor's wife replied: "Yes, the idea was mine."

They continued their walk. Louise and Gontran gradually quickened their steps, went on in advance, and rambled so far together that they disappeared from view at a turn of the narrow path.

The fat lady, who was breathing hard, murmured, as she cast an indulgent eye in their direction: "Bah! they're young—they have legs. As for me, I can't keep up with them."

Charlotte exclaimed: "Wait! I'm going to call them back!"

She was rushing away. The doctor's wife held her back: "Don't interfere with them, child, if they want to chat! It would not be nice to disturb them. They will come back all right by themselves."

And she sat down on the grass, under the shade of a pine-tree, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief. Charlotte cast a look of distress toward Paul, a look imploring and sorrowful.

He understood, and said: "Well, Mademoiselle, we are going to let Madame take a rest, and we'll both go and overtake your sister."

She answered impetuously: "Oh, yes, Monsieur."

Madame Honorat made no objection: "Go, my children, go. As for me, I'll wait for you here. Don't be too long."

And they started off in their turn. They walked quickly at first, as they could see no sign of the two others, and hoped to come up with them; then, after a few minutes, it struck them that Louise and Gontran might have turned off to the right or to the left through the wood, and Charlotte began to call them in a trembling and undecided voice. There was no response. She exclaimed: "Oh! good heavens, where can they be?"

Paul felt himself overcome once more by that profound pity, by that sympathetic tenderness toward her which had previously taken possession of him on the edge of the crater of La Nugère.

He did not know what to say to this afflicted young creature. He felt a longing, a paternal and passionate longing to take her in his arms, to embrace her, to find sweet and consoling words with which to soothe her. But what words?

She looked about on every side, searched the branches with wild glances, listening to the faintest sounds, murmuring: "I think that they are here— No, there— Do you hear nothing?"

"No, Mademoiselle, I don't hear anything. The best thing we can do is to wait here."

"Oh! heavens, no. We must find them!"

He hesitated for a few seconds, and then said to her in a low tone: "This, then, causes you much pain?"

She raised toward his her eyes, in which there was a look of wild alarm, while the gathering tears filled them with a transparent watery mist, as yet held back by the lids, over which drooped the long, brown lashes. She strove to speak, but could not, and did not venture to open her lips. But her heart swollen, choked with grief, was yearning to pour itself out.

He went on: "So then you loved him very much. He is not worthy of your love. Take heart!"

She could not restrain herself any longer, and hiding with her hands the tears that now gushed forth from her eyes, she sobbed: "No!—no!—I do not love him—he—it is too base to have acted as he did. He made a fool of me—it is too base—too cowardly—but, all the same, it does pain me—a great deal—for it is hard—very hard—oh! yes. But what grieves me most is that my sister—my sister does not care for me any longer—she who has been even more wicked than he was! I feel that she no longer cares for me—not a bit—that she hates me—I have only her—I have no one else—and I, I have done nothing!"

He only saw her ear and her neck with its young flesh sinking into the collar of her dress under the light material she wore till it was lost in the curves of her bust. And he felt himself overpowered with compassion, with sympathy, carried away by that impetuous desire of self-devotion which got the better of him every time that a woman touched his heart. And that heart of his, responsive to outbursts of enthusiasm, was excited by this innocent sorrow, agitating, ingenuous, and cruelly charming.

He stretched forth his hand toward her with an unstudied movement such as one might use in order to caress, to calm a child, and he drew it round her waist from behind over her shoulder. Then he felt her heart beating with rapid throbs, as he might have heard the little heart of a bird that he had caught. And this beating, continuous, precipitate, sent a thrill all over his arm into his heart, accelerating its movements. And he felt those quick heart-beats coming from her and penetrating him through his flesh, his muscles, and his nerves, so that between them there was now only one heart wounded by the same pain, agitated by the same palpitation, living the same life, like clocks connected by a string at some distance from one another and made to keep time together second by second.

But suddenly she uncovered her flushed face, still tear-dimmed, quickly wiped it, and said:

"Come, I ought not to have spoken to you about this. I am foolish. Let us go back at once to Madame Honorat, and forget. Do you promise me?"

"I do promise you."

She gave him her hand. "I have confidence in you. I believe you are very honest!"

They turned back. He lifted her up in crossing the stream, just as he had lifted up Christiane, the year before. How often had he passed along this path with her in the days when he adored her! He reflected, wondering at his own changed feelings: "How short a time this passion lasted!"

Charlotte, laying a finger on his arm, murmured: "Madame Honorat is asleep. Let us sit down without making a noise."

Madame Honorat was, indeed, slumbering, with her back to a pine-tree, her handkerchief over her face and her hands crossed over her stomach. They seated themselves a few paces away from her, and refrained from speaking in order not to awaken her. Then the stillness of the wood was so profound that it became as painful to them as actual suffering. Nothing could be heard save the water gurgling over the stones, a little lower down, then those imperceptible quiverings of insects passing by, those light buzzings of flies or of other living creatures whose movements made the dead leaves flutter.

Where then were Louise and Gontran? What were they doing? All at once, the sound of their voices reached them from a distance. They were returning. Madame Honorat woke up and looked astonished.

"What! you are here again! I did not notice you coming back. And the others, have you found them?"

Paul replied: "There they are! They are coming."

They recognized Gontran's laughter. This laughter relieved Charlotte from a crushing weight, which had oppressed her mind — she could not have explained why.

They were soon able to distinguish the pair. Gontran had almost broken into a running pace, dragging by the arm the young girl, who was quite flushed. And, even before they had come up, so great a hurry was he in to tell his story, he shouted:

"You don't know what we surprised. I give you a thousand guesses to discover it! The handsome Doctor Mazelli along with the daughter of the illustrious Professor Cloche, as Will would say, the pretty widow with the red hair. Oh! yes, indeed — surprised, you understand? He was embracing her, the scamp. Oh! yes — oh! yes."

Madame Honorat, at this immoderate display of gaiety, made a dignified movement:

"Oh! M. le Comte, think of these young ladies!"

Gontran made a respectful obeisance.

"You are perfectly right, dear Madame, to recall me to the proprieties. All your inspirations are excellent."

Then, in order that they might not be all seen going back together, the two young men bowed to the ladies, and returned through the wood to the village.

"Well?" asked Paul.

"Well, I told her that I adored her and that I would be delighted to marry her."

"And she said?"

"She said, with charming discretion, 'That concerns my father. It is to him that I will give my answer.'"

"So then you are going to—"

"To intrust my ambassador Andermatt at once with the official application. And if the old boor makes any row about it, I'll compromise his daughter with a splash."

And, as Andermatt was again engaged in conversation with Doctor Latonne on the terrace of the Casino, Gontran stopped here, and immediately made his brother-in-law acquainted with the situation.

Paul went off along the road to Riom. He wanted to be alone so much did he find himself invaded by that agitation of the entire mind and body into which every meeting with a woman casts a man who is on the point of falling in love. For some time past he had felt, without quite realizing it, the penetrating and youthful fascination of this forsaken girl. He found her so nice, so good, so simple, so upright, so innocent, that from the first he had been moved by compassion for her, by that tender compassion with which the sorrows of women always inspire us. Then, when he had seen her frequently, he had allowed to bud forth in his heart that grain, that tiny grain, of tenderness which they sow in us so quickly, and which grows to such a height. And now, for the last hour especially, he was beginning to feel himself possessed, to feel within him that constant presence of the absent which is the first sign of love. He proceeded along the road, haunted by the remembrance of her glance, by the sound of her voice, by the way in which she smiled or wept, by the gait with which she walked, even by the color and the flutter of her dress. And he said to himself:

"I believe I am bitten. I know it. It is annoying, this! The best thing, perhaps, would be to go back to Paris. Deuce take it, it is a young girl! However, I can't make her my mistress."

Then, he began dreaming about it, just as he had dreamed about Christiane, the year before. How different was this one, too, from all the women he had hitherto known, born and brought up in the city, different even from those young maidens sophisticated from their childhood by the coquetry of their mothers or the coquetry which shows itself in the streets. There was in her none of the artificiality of the woman prepared for seduction, nothing studied in her words, nothing conventional in her actions, nothing deceitful in her looks. Not only was she a being fresh and pure, but she came of a primitive race; she was a true daughter of the soil at the moment when she was about to be transformed into a woman of the city.

And he felt himself stirred up, pleading for her against that vague resistance which still struggled in his breast. The forms of heroines in sentimental novels passed before his mind's eye—the creations of Walter Scott, of Dickens, and of George Sand, exciting the more his imagination, always goaded by ideal pictures of women.

Gontran passed judgment on him thus: "Paul! he is a pack-horse with a Cupid on his back. When he flings one on the ground, another jumps up in its place." But Bretigny saw that night was falling. He had been a long time walking. He returned to the village.

As he was passing in front of the new baths, he saw Andermatt and the two Oriols surveying and measuring the vinefields; and he knew from their gestures that they were disputing in an excited fashion.

An hour afterward, Will, entering the drawing-room, where the entire family had assembled, said to the Marquis: "My dear father-in-law, I have to inform you that your son Gontran is going to marry, in six weeks or two months, Mademoiselle Louise Oriol."

M. de Ravenel was startled: "Gontran? You say?"

"I say that he is going to marry in six weeks or two months, with your consent, Mademoiselle Louise Oriol, who will be very rich."

Thereupon the Marquis said simply: "Good heavens! if he likes it, I have no objection."

And the banker related how he had dealt with the old countryman. As soon as he had learned from the Comte that the young girl would consent, he wanted to obtain, at one interview, the vinedresser's assent without giving him time to prepare any of his dodges. He accordingly hurried to Oriol's house, and found him making up his accounts with great difficulty, assisted by Colosse, who was adding figures together with his fingers.

Seating himself: "I would like to drink of your excellent wine," said he.

When big Colosse had returned with the glasses and the jug brimming over, he asked whether Mademoiselle Louise had come home; then he begged of them to send for her. When she stood facing him, he rose, and, making her a low bow:

"Mademoiselle, will you regard me at this moment as a friend to whom one may say everything? Is it not so? Well, I am charged with a very delicate mission with reference to you. My brother-in-law, Comte Raoul-Olivier-Gontran de Ravenel, is smitten with you — a thing for which I commend him — and he has commissioned me to ask you, in the presence of your family, whether you will consent to become his wife."

Taken by surprise in this way, she turned toward her father her eyes, which betrayed her confusion. And Père Oriol, scared, looked at his son, his usual counselor, while Colosse looked at Andermatt, who went on, with a certain amount of pomposity:

"You understand, Mademoiselle, that I am only intrusted with this mission on the terms of an immediate reply being given to my brother-in-law. He is quite conscious of the fact that you may not care for him, and in that case he will quit this neighborhood to-morrow, never to come back to it again. I am aware, besides, that you know him sufficiently to say to me, a simple intermediary, 'I consent,' or 'I do not consent.'"

She hung down her head, and, blushing, but resolute, she faltered: "I consent, Monsieur."

Then she fled so quickly that she knocked herself against the door as she went out.

Thereupon, Andermatt sat down, and, pouring out a glass of wine after the fashion of peasants:

"Now we are going to talk about business," said he.

And, without admitting the possibility even of hesitation, he attacked the question of the dowry, relying on the declarations made to him by the vine-dresser three months before. He estimated at three hundred thousand francs, in addition to expectations, the actual fortune of Gontran, and he let it be understood that if a man like the Comte de Ravenel consented to ask for the hand of Oriol's daughter, a very charming young lady in other respects, it was unquestionable that the girl's family were bound to show their appreciation of this honor by a sacrifice of money.

Then the countryman, much disconcerted, but flattered—almost disarmed, tried to make a fight for his property. The discussion was a long one. An admission on Andermatt's part had, however, rendered it easy from the start:

"We don't ask for ready money nor for bills—nothing but the lands, those which you have already indicated as forming Mademoiselle Louise's dowry, in addition to some others which I am going to point you."

The prospect of not having to pay money, that money slowly heaped together, brought into the house franc after franc, sou after sou, that good money, white or yellow, worn by the hands, the purses, the pockets, the tables of *cafés*, the deep drawers of old presses, that money in whose ring was told the history of so many troubles, cares, fatigues, labors, so sweet to the heart, to the eyes, to the fingers of the peasant, dearer than the cow, than the vine, than the field, than the house, that money harder to part with sometimes than life itself—the prospect of not seeing it go with the girl brought on immediately a great calm, a desire to conciliate, a secret but restrained joy, in the souls of the father and the son.

They continued the discussion, however, in order to keep a few more acres of soil. On the table was spread out a minute plan of Mont Oriol; and they marked one by one with a cross the portions assigned to Louise. It took an hour for Andermatt to secure the last two pieces. Then, in order that there might not be any deceit on one side or the other, they went over all the places on the plan. After that, they identified carefully all the slices designated by crosses, and marked them afresh.

But Andermatt got uneasy, suspecting that the two Oriols were capable of denying, at their next interview, a part of the grants to which they had consented and would seek to take back ends of vinefields, corners useful for his project; and he thought of a practical and certain means of giving definiteness to the agreement.

An idea crossed his mind, made him smile at first, then appeared to him excellent, although singular.

"If you like," said he, "we'll write it all out, so as not to forget it later on."

And as they were entering the village, he stopped before a tobacconist's shop to buy two stamped sheets of paper. He knew that the list of lands drawn up on these leaves with their legal aspect would take an almost inviolable character in the peasant's eyes, for these leaves would represent the law, always invisible and menacing, vindicated by gendarmes, fines, and imprisonment.

Then he wrote on one sheet and copied on the other:

"In pursuance of the promise of marriage exchanged between Comte Gontran de Ravenel and Mademoiselle Louise Oriol, M. Oriol, Senior, surrenders as a dowry to his daughter the lands designated below—"

And he enumerated them minutely, with the figures attached to them in the register of lands for the district.

Then, having dated and signed the document, he made Père Oriol affix his signature, after the latter had exacted in turn a written statement of the intended husband's fortune, and he went back to the hotel with the document in his pocket.

Everyone laughed at his narrative and Gontran most of all. Then the Marquis said to his son with a lofty air of dignity: "We shall both go this evening to pay a visit to this family, and I shall myself renew the application previously made by my son-in-law in order that it may be more regular."

CHAPTER XIII.

PAUL CHANGES HIS MIND

GONTRAN made an admirable *fiancé*, as courteous as he was assiduous. With the aid of Andermatt's purse, he made presents to everyone; and he constantly visited the young girl, either at her own house, or that of Madame Honorat. Paul nearly always accompanied him now, in order to have the opportunity of meeting Charlotte, saying to himself, after each visit, that he would see her no more.

She had bravely resigned herself to her sister's marriage, and she referred to it with apparent unconcern, as if it did not cause her the slightest anxiety. Her character alone seemed a little altered, more sedate, less open. While Gontran was talking soft nothings to Louise in a half-whisper in a corner, Bretigny conversed with her in a serious fashion, and allowed himself to be slowly vanquished, allowed this fresh love to inundate his soul like a flowing tide. He knew what was happening to him, and gave himself up to it, thinking: "Bah! when the moment arrives, I will make my escape—that's all."

When he left her, he would go up to see Christiane, who now lay from morning till night stretched on a long chair. At the door, he could not help feeling nervous and irritated, prepared beforehand for those light quarrels to which weariness gives birth. All that she said, all that she was thinking of, annoyed him, even ere she had opened her lips. Her appearance of suffering, her resigned attitude, her looks of reproach and of supplication, made words of anger rise to his lips, which he repressed through good-breeding; and, even when by her side, he kept before his mind the constant memory, the fixed image, of the young girl whom he had just quitted.

As Christiane, tormented with seeing so little of him, overwhelmed him with questions as to how he spent his days, he invented stories, to which she listened attentively, seeking to find out whether he was thinking of some other woman. The powerlessness which she felt in herself to keep a hold on this man, the powerlessness to pour into him a little of that love with which she was tortured, the physical powerlessness to fascinate him still, to give herself to him, to win him back by caresses, since she could not regain him by the tender intimacies of love, made her suspect the worst, without knowing on what to fix her fears.

She vaguely realized that some danger was lowering over her, some great unknown danger. And she was filled with undefined jealousy, jealousy of everything — of women whom she saw passing by her window, and whom she thought charming, without even having any proof that Bretigny had ever spoken to them.

She asked of him: "Have you noticed a very pretty woman, a brunette, rather tall, whom I saw a little while ago, and who must have arrived here within the past few days?"

When he replied, "No, I don't know her," she at once jumped to the conclusion that he was lying, turned pale, and went on: "But it is not possible that you have not seen her. She appears to me very beautiful."

He was astonished at her persistency. "I assure you I have not seen her. I'll try to come across her."

She thought: "Surely it must be she!" She felt persuaded, too, on certain days, that he was hiding some intrigue in the locality, that he had sent for his mistress, an actress perhaps. And she questioned everybody, her father, her brother, and her husband, about all the women young and desirable, whom they observed in the neighborhood of Enval. If only she could have walked about, and seen for herself, she might have reassured herself a little; but the almost complete loss of motion which her condition forced upon her now made her endure an intolerable martyrdom.

When she spoke to Paul, the tone of her voice alone revealed her anguish, and intensified his nervous impatience with this love, which for him was at an end. He could no longer talk quietly about anything with her save the approaching marriage of Gontran, a subject which enabled him to pronounce Charlotte's name, and to give vent to his thoughts aloud about the young girl. And it was a mysterious source of delight to him even to hear Christiane articulating that name, praising the grace and all the qualities of this little maiden, compassionating her, regretting that her brother should have sacrificed her, and expressing a desire that some man, some noble heart, should appreciate her, love her, and marry her.

He said: "Oh! yes, Gontran acted foolishly there. She is perfectly charming, that young girl."

Christiane, without any misgiving, echoed: "Perfectly charming. She is a pearl! a piece of perfection!"

Never had she thought that a man like Paul could love a little maid like this, or that he would be likely to marry her. She had no apprehensions save of his mistresses. And it was a singular phenomenon of the heart that praise of Charlotte from Christiane's lips assumed in his eyes an extreme value, excited his love, whetted his desire, and surrounded the young girl with an irresistible attraction.

Now, one day, when he called at Madame Honorat's house to meet there the Oriol girls, they found Doctor Mazelli installed there as if he was at home. He stretched forth both hands to the two young men, with that Italian smile of his, which seemed to give away his entire heart with every word and every movement.

Gontran and he were linked by a friendship at once familiar and futile, made up of secret affinities, of hidden likenesses, of a sort of confederacy of instincts, rather than any real affection or confidence.

The Comte asked: "What about your little blonde of the Sans-Souci wood?"

The Italian smiled: "Bah! we are on terms of indifference toward one another. She is one of those women who offer everything and give nothing."

And they began to chat. The handsome physician performed certain offices for the young girls, especially for Charlotte. When addressing women, he manifested a perpetual adoration in his voice, his gestures, and his looks. His entire person, from head to foot, said to them, "I love you" with an eloquence in his attitude which never failed to win their favor. He displayed the graces of an actress, the light pirouettes of a *danseuse,* the supple movements of a juggler, an entire science of seduction natural and acquired, of which he constantly made use.

Paul, when returning to the hotel with Gontran, exclaimed in a tone of sullen vexation: "What does this charlatan come to that house for?"

The Comte replied quietly: "How can you ever tell when dealing with such adventurers? These sort of people slip in everywhere. This fellow must be tired of his vagabond existence, and of giving way to every caprice of his Spaniard, of whom he is rather the valet than the physician — and perhaps something more. He is looking about him. Professor Cloche's daughter was a good catch — he has failed with her, he says. The second of the Oriol girls would not be less valuable to him. He is making the attempt, feeling his way, smelling about, sounding. He would become co-proprietor of the waters, would try to knock over that idiot, Latonne, would in any case get an excellent practice here every summer for himself, which would last him over the winter. Faith! this is his plan exactly — no doubt of it!"

A dull rage, a jealous animosity, was aroused in Paul's heart. A voice exclaimed: "Hey! hey!" It was Mazelli, who had overtaken them. Bretigny said to him, with aggressive irony: "Where are you rushing so quickly, doctor? One would say that you were pursuing fortune." The Italian smiled, and, without stopping, but skipping backward, he plunged, with a mimic's graceful movement, his hands into his two pockets, quickly turned them out and showed them, both empty, holding them wide between two fingers by the ends of the seams. Then he said: "I have not got hold of it yet." And, turning on his toes, he rushed away like a man in a great hurry.

They found him again several times, on the following days, at Doctor Honorat's house, where he made himself useful to the three ladies by a thousand graceful little services, by the same clever tactics which he had no doubt adopted when dealing with the Duchess. He knew how to do everything to perfection, from paying compliments to making macaroni. He was, moreover, an excellent cook, and protecting himself from stains by means of a servant's blue apron, and wearing a chef's cap made of paper on his head, while he sang Neapolitan ditties in Italian, he did the work of a scullion, without appearing a bit ridiculous, amusing and fascinating everybody, down to the half-witted housekeeper, who said of him: "He is a marvel!"

His plans were soon obvious, and Paul no longer had any doubt that he was trying to get Charlotte to fall in love with him. He seemed to be succeeding in this. He was so profuse of flattery, so eager, so artful in striving to please, that the young girl's face had, when she looked at him, that air of contentment which indicates that the heart is gratified.

Paul, in his turn, without being even able to account to himself for his conduct, assumed the attitude of a lover, and set himself up as a rival. When he saw the doctor with Charlotte, he would come on the scene, and, with his more direct manner, exert himself to win the young girl's affections. He showed himself straigthforward and sympathetic, fraternal, devoted, repeating to her, with the sincerity of a friend, in a tone so frank that one could scarcely see in it an avowal of love: "I am very fond of you; cheer up!"

Mazelli, astonished at this unexpected rivalry, had recourse to all his powers of captivation; and, when Bretigny, bitten with jealousy, that naïve jealousy which takes possession of a man when he is dealing with any woman, even without being in love with her, provided only he has taken a fancy to her — when, filled with this natural violence, he became aggressive and haughty, the other, more pliant, always master of himself, replied with sly allusions, witticisms, well-turned and mocking compliments.

It was a daily warfare which they both waged fiercely, without either of them perhaps having a well-defined object in view. They did not want to give way, like two dogs who have gained a grip of the same quarry.

Charlotte had recovered her good humor, but along with it she now exhibited a more biting waggery, a certain sphinx-like attitude, less candor in her smile and in her glance. One would have said that Gontran's desertion had educated her, prepared her for possible deceptions, disciplined, and armed her.

She played off her two admirers against one another in a sly and dexterous fashion, saying to each of them what she thought necessary, without letting the one fall foul of the other, without ever letting the one suppose that she preferred the other, laughing slightly at each of them in turn in the presence of his rival, leaving them an equal match without appearing even to take either of them seriously. But all this was done simply, in the manner of a schoolgirl rather than in that of a coquette, with that mischievous air exhibited by young girls which sometimes renders them irresistible.

Mazelli, however, seemed suddenly to be having the advantage. He had apparently become more intimate with her, as if a secret understanding had been established between them. While talking to her, he played lightly with her parasol and with one of the ribbons of her dress, which appeared to Paul, as it were, an act of moral possession, and exasperated him so much that he longed to box the Italian's ears.

But, one day, at Père Oriol's house, while Bretigny was chatting with Louise and Gontran, and, at the same time, keeping his eye fixed on Mazelli, who was telling Charlotte in a subdued voice some things that made her smile, he suddenly saw her blush with such an appearance of embarrassment as to leave no doubt for one moment on his mind that the other had spoken of love. She had cast down her eyes, and ceased to smile, but still continued listening; and Paul, who felt disposed to make a scene, said to Gontran: "Will you have the goodness to come out with me for five minutes?"

The Comte made his excuses to his betrothed, and followed his friend.

When they were in the street, Paul exclaimed: "My dear fellow, this wretched Italian must, at any cost, be prevented from inveigling this girl, who is defenseless against him."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"To warn her of the fact that he is an adventurer."

"Hey, my dear boy, those things are no concern of mine."

"After all, she is to be your sister-in-law."

"Yes, but there is nothing to show me conclusively that Mazelli has guilty designs upon her. He exhibits the same gallantry toward all women, and he has never said or done anything improper."

"Well, if you don't want to take it on yourself, I'll do it, although it concerns me less assuredly than it does you."

"So then you are in love with Charlotte?"

"I? No—but I see clearly through this blackguard's game."

"My dear fellow, you are mixing yourself up in matters of a delicate nature, and—unless you are in love with Charlotte—"

"No—I am not in love with her—but I am hunting down imposters, that's what I mean!"

"May I ask what you intend to do?"

"To thrash this beggar."

"Good! the best way to make her fall in love with him. You fight with him, and whether he wounds you, or you wound him, he will become a hero in her eyes."

"What would you do then?"

"In your place?"

"In my place."

"I would speak to the girl as a friend. She has great confidence in you. Well, I would say to her simply in a few words what these hangers-on of society are. You know very well how to say these things. You possess an eloquent tongue. And I would make her understand, first, why he is attached to the Spaniard; secondly, why he attempted to lay siege to Professor Cloche's daughter; thirdly, why, not having succeeded in this effort, he is striving, in the last place, to make a conquest of Mademoiselle Charlotte Oriol."

"Why do you not do that, yourself, who will be her brother-in-law?"

"Because — because — on account of what passed between us — come! I can't."

"That's quite right. I am going to speak to her."

"Do you want me to procure for you a private conversation with her immediately?"

"Why, yes, assuredly."

"Good! Walk about for ten minutes. I am going to carry off Louise and Mazelli, and, when you come back, you will find the other alone."

Paul Bretigny rambled along the side of the Enval gorges, thinking over the best way of opening this difficult conversation.

He found Charlotte Oriol alone, indeed, on his return, in the cold, whitewashed parlor of the paternal abode; and he said to her, as he sat down beside her: "It is I, Mademoiselle, who asked Gontran to procure me this interview with you."

She looked at him with her clear eyes: "Why, pray?"

"Oh! it is not to pay you insipid compliments in the Italian fashion. It is to speak to you as a friend—as a very devoted friend, who owes you good advice."

"Tell me what it is."

He took up the subject in a roundabout style, dwelt upon his own experience, and upon her inexperience, so as to lead gradually by discreet but explicit phrases to a reference to those adventurers who are everywhere going in quest of fortune, taking advantage with their professional skill of every ingenuous and good-natured being, man or woman, whose purses or hearts they explored.

She turned rather pale as she listened to him.

Then she said: "I understand and I don't understand. You are speaking of some one—of whom?"

"I am speaking of Doctor Mazelli."

Then, she lowered her eyes, and remained a few seconds without replying; after this, in a hesitating voice: "You are so frank that I will be the same with you. Since—since my sister's marriage has been arranged, I have become a little less—a little less stupid! Well, I had already suspected what you tell me—and I used to feel amused of my own accord at seeing him coming."

She raised her face to his as she spoke, and in her smile, in her arch look, in her little *retroussé* nose, in the moist and glittering brilliancy of her teeth which showed themselves between her lips, so much open-hearted gracefulness, sly gaiety, and charming frolicsomeness appeared that Bretigny felt himself drawn toward her by one of those tumultuous transports which flung him distracted with passion at the feet of the woman who was his latest love. And his heart exulted with joy because Mazelli had not been preferred to him. So then he had triumphed.

He asked: "You do not love him, then?"

"Whom? Mazelli?"

"Yes."

She looked at him with such a pained expression in her eyes that he felt thrown off his balance, and stammered, in a supplicating voice: "What?—you don't love—anyone?"

She replied, with a downward glance: "I don't know—I love people who love me."

He seized the young girl's two hands, all at once, and kissing them wildly in one of those moments of impulse in which the head loses its controlling power, and the words which rise to the lips come from the excited flesh rather than the wandering mind, he faltered:

"I!—I love you, my little Charlotte; yes, I love you!"

She quickly drew away one of her hands, and placed it on his mouth, murmuring: "Be silent!—be silent, I beg of you! It would cause me too much pain if this were another falsehood."

She stood erect; he rose up, caught her in his arms, and embraced her passionately.

A sudden noise parted them; Père Oriol had just come in, and he was gazing at them, quite scared. Then, he cried: "Ah! bougrrre! ah! bougrrre! ah! bougrrre of a savage!"

Charlotte had rushed out, and the two men remained face to face. After some seconds of agitation, Paul made an attempt to explain his position.

"My God! Monsieur—I have conducted myself—it is true—like a—"

But the old man would not listen to him. Anger, furious anger, had taken possession of him, and he advanced toward Bretigny, with clenched fists, repeating:

"Ah! bougrrre of a savage—"

Then, when they were nose to nose, he seized Paul by the collar with his knotted peasant's hands.

But the other, as tall, and strong with that superior strength acquired by the practice of athletics, freed himself with a single push from the countryman's grip, and, pushing him up against the wall:

"Listen, Père Oriol, this is not a matter for us to fight about, but to settle quietly. It is true, I was embracing your daughter. I swear to you that this is the first time—and I swear to you, too, that I desire to marry her."

The old man, whose physical excitement had subsided under the assault of his adversary, but whose anger had not yet been calmed, stuttered:

"Ha! that's how it is! You want to steal my daughter; you want my money. Bougrrre of a deceiver!"

Thereupon, he allowed all that was on his mind to escape from him in a heap of grumbling words. He found no consolation for the dowry promised with his elder girl, for his vinelands going into the hands of these Parisians. He now had his suspicions as to Gontran's want of money, Andermatt's craft, and, without forgetting the unexpected fortune which the banker brought him, he vented his bile and his secret rancor against those mischievous people who did not let him sleep any longer in peace.

One would have thought that his family and his friends were coming every night to plunder him, to rob him of everything, his lands, his springs, and his daughters. And he cast these reproaches into Paul's face, accusing him also of wanting to get hold of his property, of being a rogue, and of taking Charlotte in order to have his lands.

The other, soon losing all patience, shouted under his very nose: "Why, I am richer than you, you infernally currish old donkey. I would bring you money."

The old man listened in silence to these words, incredulous but vigilant, and then, in a milder tone, he renewed his complaints.

Paul then answered him and entered into explanations; and, believing that an obligation was imposed on him, owing to the circumstances under which he had been surprised, and for which he was solely responsible, he proposed to marry the girl without asking for any dowry.

Père Oriol shook his head and his ears, heard Paul reiterating his statements, but was unable to understand. To him this young man seemed still a pauper, a penniless wretch.

And, when Bretigny, exasperated, yelled, in his teeth: "Why, you old rascal, I have an income of more than a hundred and twenty thousand francs a year—do you understand?—three millions," the other suddenly asked: "Will you write that down on a piece of paper?"

"Yes, I will write it down!"

"And you'll sign it?"

"Yes, I will sign it."

"On a sheet of notary's paper?"

"Yes, certainly—on a sheet of notary's paper!"

Thereupon, he rose up, opened a press, took out of it two leaves marked with the Government stamp, and, seeking for the undertaking which Andermatt, a few days before, had required from him, he drew up an odd promise of marriage, in which it was made a condition that the *fiancé* vouched for his being worth three millions; and, at the end of it Bretigny affixed his signature.

When Paul found himself in the open air once more, he felt as if the earth no longer turned round in the same way. So then, he was engaged, in spite of himself, in spite of her, by one of those accidents, by one of those tricks of circumstance, which shut out from you every point of escape. He muttered: "What madness!" Then he reflected: "Bah! I could not have found better perhaps in all the world!"

And in his secret heart he rejoiced at this snare of destiny.

CHAPTER XIV.

Christiane's Via Crucis

THE dawn of the following day brought bad news to Andermatt. He learned on his arrival at the bath-establishment that M. Aubry-Pasteur had died during the night from an attack of apoplexy at the Hotel Splendid.

In addition to the fact that the deceased was very useful to him on account of his vast scientific attainments, disinterested zeal, and attachment to the Mont Oriol station, which, in some measure, he looked upon as a daughter, it was much to be regretted that a patient who had come there to fight against a tendency toward congestion should have died exactly in this fashion, in the midst of his treatment, in the very height of the season, at the very moment when the rising spa was beginning to prove a success.

The banker, exceedingly annoyed, walked up and down in the study of the absent inspector, thinking of some device whereby this misfortune might be attributed to some other cause, such as an accident, a fall, a want of prudence, the rupture of an artery; and he impatiently awaited Doctor Latonne's arrival in order that the decease might be ingeniously certified without awakening any suspicion as to the initial cause of the fatality.

All at once, the medical inspector appeared on the scene, his face pale and indicative of extreme agitation; and, as soon as he had passed through the door, he asked: "Have you heard the lamentable news?"

"Yes, the death of M. Aubry-Pasteur."

"No, no, the flight of Doctor Mazelli with Professor Cloche's daughter."

Andermatt felt a shiver running along his skin.

"What? you tell me—"

"Oh! my dear manager, it is a frightful catastrophe, a crash!"

He sat down and wiped his forehead; then he related the facts as he got them from Petrus Martel, who had learned them directly through the professor's valet.

Mazelli had paid very marked attentions to the pretty red-haired widow, a coarse coquette, a wanton, whose first husband had succumbed to consumption, brought on, it was said, by excessive devotion to his matrimonial duties. But M. Cloche, having discovered the projects of the Italian physician, and not desiring this adventurer as a second son-in-law, violently turned him out of doors on surprising him kneeling at the widow's feet.

Mazelli, having been sent out by the door, soon re-entered through the window by the silken ladder of lovers. Two versions of the affair were current. According to the first, he had rendered the professor's daughter mad with love and jealousy; according to the second, he had continued to see her secretly, while pretending to be devoting his attention to another woman; and ascertaining finally through his mistress that the professor remained inflexible, he had carried her off, the same night, rendering a marriage inevitable, in consequence of this scandal.

Doctor Latonne rose up and, leaning his back against the mantelpiece, while Andermatt, astounded, continued walking up and down, he exclaimed:

"A physician, Monsieur, a physician to do such a thing!—a doctor of medicine!—what an absence of character!"

Andermatt, completely crushed, appreciated the consequences, classified them, and weighed them, as one does a sum in addition. They were: "First, the disagreeable report spreading over the neighboring spas and all the way to Paris. If, however, they went the right way about it, perhaps they could make use of this elopement as an advertisement. A fortnight's echoes well written and prominently printed in the newspapers would strongly attract attention to Mont Oriol. Secondly: Professor Cloche's departure an irreparable loss. Thirdly: The departure of the Duchess and the Duke de Ramas-Aldavarra, a second inevitable loss without possible compensation. In short, Doctor Latonne was right. It was a frightful catastrophe."

Then, the banker, turning toward the physician: "You ought to go at once to the Hotel Splendid, and draw up the certificate of the death of Aubry-

Pasteur in such a way that no one could suspect it to be a case of congestion."

Doctor Latonne put on his hat; then just as he was leaving: "Ha! another rumor which is circulating! Is it true that your friend Paul Bretigny is going to marry Charlotte Oriol?"

Andermatt gave a start of astonishment.

"Bretigny? Come now! — who told you that?"

"Why, as in the other case, Petrus Martel, who had it from Père Oriol himself."

"From Père Oriol?"

"Yes, from Père Oriol, who declared that his future son-in-law possessed a fortune of three millions."

William did not know what to think. He muttered: "In point of fact, it is possible. He has been rather hot on her for some time past! But in that case the whole knoll is ours — the whole knoll! Oh! I must make certain of this immediately." And he went out after the doctor in order to meet Paul before breakfast.

As he was entering the hotel, he was informed that his wife had several times asked to see him. He found her still in bed, chatting with her father and with her brother, who was looking through the newspapers with a rapid and wandering glance. She felt poorly, very poorly, restless. She was afraid, without knowing why. And then an idea had come to her, and had for some days been growing stronger in her brain, as usually happens with pregnant women. She wanted to consult Doctor Black. From the effect of hearing around her some jokes at Doctor Latonne's expense, she had lost all confidence in him, and she wanted another opinion, that of Doctor

Black, whose success was constantly increasing. Fears, all the fears, all the hauntings, by which women toward the close of pregnancy are besieged, now tortured her from morning until night. Since the night before, in consequence of a dream, she imagined that the Cæsarian operation might be necessary. And she was present in thought at this operation performed on herself. She saw herself lying on her back in a bed covered with blood, while something red was being taken away, which did not move, which did not cry, and which was dead! And for ten minutes she shut her eyes, in order to witness this over again, to be present once more at her horrible and painful punishment. She had, therefore, become impressed with the notion that Doctor Black alone could tell her the truth, and she wanted him at once; she required him to examine her immediately, immediately, immediately! Andermatt, greatly agitated, did not know what answer to give her.

"But my dear child, it is difficult, having regard to my relations with Latonne it is even impossible. Listen! an idea occurs to me: I will look up Professor Mas-Roussel, who is a hundred times better than Black. He will not refuse to come when I ask him."

But she persisted. She wanted Black, and no one else. She required to see him with his big bulldog's head beside her. It was a longing, a wild, superstitious desire. She considered it necessary for him to see her.

Then William attempted to change the current of her thoughts:

"You haven't heard how that intriguer Mazelli carried off Professor Cloche's daughter the other night.

They are gone away; nobody can tell where they levanted to. There's a nice story for you!"

She was propped up on her pillow, her eyes strained with grief, and she faltered: "Oh! the poor Duchess—the poor woman—how I pity her!" Her heart had long since learned to understand that other woman's heart, bruised and impassioned! She suffered from the same malady and wept the same tears. But she resumed: "Listen, Will! Go and find M. Black for me. I know I shall die unless he comes!"

Andermatt caught her hand, and tenderly kissed it:

"Come, my little Christiane, be reasonable—understand."

He saw her eyes filled with tears, and, turning toward the Marquis:

"It is you that ought to do this, my dear father-in-law. As for me, I can't do it. Black comes here every day about one o'clock to see the Princess de Maldebourg. Stop him in the passage, and send him in to your daughter. You can easily wait an hour, can you not, Christiane?"

She consented to wait an hour, but refused to get up to breakfast with the men, who passed alone into the dining-room.

Paul was there already. Andermatt, when he saw him, exclaimed: "Ah! tell me now, what is it I have been told a little while ago? You are going to marry Charlotte Oriol? It is not true, is it?"

The young man replied in a low tone, casting a restless look toward the closed door: "Good God! it is true!" Nobody having been sure of it till now, the three stared at him in amazement.

William asked: "What came over you? With your fortune, to marry—to embarrass yourself with one woman, when you have the whole of them? And then, after all, the family leaves something to be desired in the matter of refinement. It is all very well for Gontran, who hasn't a sou!"

Bretigny began to laugh: "My father made a fortune out of flour; he was then a miller on a large scale. If you had known him, you might have said he lacked refinement. As for the young girl—"

Andermatt interrupted him: "Oh! perfect—charming—perfect—and you know—she will be as rich as yourself—if not more so. I answer for it—I—I answer for it!"

Gontran murmured: "Yes, this marriage interferes with nothing, and covers retreats. Only he was wrong in not giving us notice beforehand. How the devil was this business managed, my friend?"

Thereupon, Paul related all that had occurred with some slight modifications. He told about his hesitation, which he exaggerated, and his sudden determination on discovering from the young girl's own lips that she loved him. He described the unexpected entrance of Père Oriol, their quarrel, which he enlarged upon, the countryman's doubts concerning his fortune, and the incident of the stamped paper drawn by the old man out of the press.

Andermatt, laughing till the tears ran down his face, hit the table with his fist: "Ha! he did that over again, the stamped paper touch! It's my invention, that is!"

But Paul stammered, reddening a little: "Pray don't let your wife know about it yet. Owing to the terms which we are on at present, it is more suitable that I should announce it to her myself."

Gontran eyed his friend with an odd, good-humored smile, which seemed to say: "This is quite right, all this, quite right! That's the way things ought to end, without noise, without scandals, without any dramatic situations."

He suggested: "If you like, my dear Paul, we'll go together, after dinner, when she's up, and you will inform her of your decision."

Their eyes met, fixed, full of unfathomable thoughts, then looked in another direction. And Paul replied with an air of indifference:

"Yes, willingly. We'll talk about this presently."

A waiter from the hotel came to inform them that Doctor Black had just arrived for his visit to the Princess; and the Marquis forthwith went out to catch him in the passage. He explained the situation to the doctor, his son-in-law's embarrassment and his daughter's earnest wish, and he brought him in without resistance.

As soon as the little man with the big head had entered Christiane's apartment, she said: "Papa. leave us alone!" And the Marquis withdrew.

Thereupon, she enumerated her disquietudes, her terrors, her nightmares, in a low, sweet voice, as though she were at confession. And the physician listened to her like a priest, covering her sometimes with his big round eyes, showed his attention by a little nod of the head, murmured a "That's it," which seemed to mean, "I know your case at the end of my fingers, and I will cure you whenever I like."

When she had finished speaking, he began in his turn to question her with extreme minuteness of detail about her life, her habits, her course of diet, her treatment. At one moment he appeared to express approval with a gesture, at another to convey blame with an "Oh!" full of reservations. When she came to her great fear that the child was misplaced, he rose up, and with an ecclesiastical modesty, lightly passed his hand over the counterpane, and then remarked, "No, it's all right."

And she felt a longing to embrace him. What a good man this physician was!

He sat down at the table, took a sheet of paper, and wrote out the prescription. It was long, very long. Then he came back close to the bed, and, in an altered tone, clearly indicating that he had finished his professional and sacred duty, he began to chat. He had a deep, unctuous voice, the powerful voice of a thickset dwarf, and there were hidden questions in his most ordinary phrases. He talked about everything. Gontran's marriage seemed to interest him considerably. Then, with his ugly smile like that of an ill-shaped being:

"I have said nothing yet to you about M. Bretigny's marriage, although it cannot be a secret, for Père Oriol has told it to everybody."

A kind of fainting fit took possession of her, commencing at the end of her fingers, then invading her entire body—her arms, her breast, her stomach, her legs. She did not, however, quite understand; but a horrible fear of not learning the truth suddenly restored her powers of observation, and she faltered: "Ha! Père Oriol has told it to everybody?"

"Yes, yes. He was speaking to myself about it less than ten minutes ago. It appears that M. Bretigny is very rich, and that he has been in love with little Charlotte for some time past. Moreover, it is Madame Honorat who made these two matches. She lent her hands and her house for the meetings of the young people."

Christiane had closed her eyes. She had lost consciousness. In answer to the doctor's call, a chambermaid rushed in; then appeared the Marquis, Andermatt, and Gontran, who went to search for vinegar, ether, ice, twenty different things all equally useless. Suddenly, the young woman moved, opened her eyes, lifted up her arms, and uttered a heart-rending cry, writhing in the bed. She tried to speak, and in a broken voice said:

"Oh! what pain I feel—my God!—what pain I feel—in my back—something is tearing me— Oh! my God!" And she broke out into fresh shrieks.

The symptoms of confinement were speedily recognized. Then Andermatt rushed off to find Doctor Latonne, and came upon him finishing his meal.

"Come on quickly—my wife has met with a mishap—hurry on!" Then he made use of a little deception, telling how Doctor Black had been found in the hotel at the moment of the first pains. Doctor Black himself confirmed this falsehood by saying to his brother-physician:

"I had just come to visit the Princess when I was informed that Madame Andermatt was taken ill. I hurried to her. It was time!"

But William, in a state of great excitement, his heart beating, his soul filled with alarm was all at once seized with doubts as to the competency of the two professional men, and he started off afresh, bareheaded, in order to run in the direction of Professor Mas-Roussel's house, and to entreat him to come. The professor consented to do so at once, buttoned on his frock-coat with the mechanical movement of a physician going out to pay a visit, and set forth with great, rapid strides, the eager strides of an eminent man whose presence may save a life.

When he arrived on the scene, the two other doctors, full of deference, consulted him with an air of humility, repeating together or nearly at the same time:

"Here is what has occurred, dear master. Don't you think, dear master? Isn't there reason to believe, dear master?"

Andermatt, in his turn, driven crazy with anguish at the moanings of his wife, harassed M. Mas-Roussel with questions, and also addressed him as "dear master" with wide-open mouth.

Christiane, almost naked in the presence of these men, no longer saw, noticed, or understood anything. She was suffering so dreadfully that everything else had vanished from her consciousness. It seemed to her that they were drawing from the tops of her hips along her side and her back a long saw, with blunt teeth, which was mangling her bones and muscles slowly and in an irregular fashion, with shakings, stoppages, and renewals of the operation, which became every moment more and more frightful.

When this torture abated for a few seconds, when the rendings of her body allowed her reason to come back, one thought then fixed itself in her soul, more cruel, more keen, more terrible, than her physical pain: "He was in love with another woman, and was going to marry her!"

And, in order to get rid of this pang, which was eating into her brain, she struggled to bring on once more the atrocious torment of her flesh; she shook her sides; she strained her back; and when the crisis returned again, she had, at least, lost all capacity for thought.

For fifteen hours she endured this martyrdom, so much bruised by suffering and despair that she longed to die, and strove to die in those spasms in which she writhed.

But, after a convulsion longer and more violent than the rest, it seemed to her that everything inside her body suddenly escaped from her. It was over; her pangs were assuaged, like the waves of the sea, when they are calmed; and the relief which she experienced was so intense that, for a time, even her grief became numbed. They spoke to her. She answered in a voice very weak, very low.

Suddenly, Andermatt stooped down, his face toward hers, and he said: "She will live—she is almost at the end of it. It is a girl!"

Christiane was only able to articulate: "Ah! my God!"

So then she had a child, a living child, who would grow big—a child of Paul! She felt a desire to cry out, all this fresh misfortune crushed her heart. She had a daughter. She did not want it! She would not look at it! She would never touch it!

They had laid her down again on the bed, taken care of her, tenderly embraced her. Who had done this? No doubt, her father and her husband. She could not tell. But he—where was he? What was he doing? How happy she would have felt at that moment, if only he still loved her!

The hours dragged along, following each other without any distinction between day and night so far as she was concerned, for she felt only this one thought burning into her soul: he loved another woman.

Then she said to herself all of a sudden: "What if it were false? Why should I not have known about his marriage sooner than this doctor?" After that, came the reflection that it had been kept hidden from her. Paul had taken care that she should not hear about it.

She glanced around her room to see who was there. A woman whom she did not know was keeping watch by her side, a woman of the people. She did not venture to question her. From whom, then, could she make inquiries about this matter?

The door was suddenly pushed open. Her husband entered on the tips of his toes. Seeing that her eyes were open, he came over to her.

"Are you better?"

"Yes, thanks."

"You frightened us very much since yesterday. But there is an end of the danger! By the bye, I am quite embarrassed about your case. I telegraphed to our friend, Madame Icardon, who was to have come to stay with you during your confinement, informing her about your premature illness, and imploring her to hasten down here. She is with her nephew, who has an attack of scarlet fever. You cannot, however, remain without anyone near you, without some woman who is a little — a little suitable for the purpose. Accordingly, a lady from the neighborhood has offered to nurse you, and to keep you company every day, and, faith, I have accepted the offer. It is Madame Honorat."

Christiane suddenly remembered Doctor Black's words. A start of fear shook her; and she groaned: "Oh! no — no — not she!"

William did not understand, and went on: "Listen, I know well that she is very common; but your brother has a great esteem for her; she has been of great service to him; and then it has been thrown out that she was originally a midwife, whom Honorat made the acquaintance of while attending a patient. If you take a strong dislike to her, I will send her away the next day. Let us try her at any rate. Let her come once or twice."

She remained silent, thinking. A craving to know, to know everything, entered into her, so violent that the hope of making this woman chatter freely, of tearing from her one by one the words that would rend her own heart, now filled her with a yearning to reply: "Go, go, and look for her immediately — immediately. Go, pray!"

And to this irresistible desire to know was also superadded a strange longing to suffer more intensely, to roll herself about in her misery, as she might have rolled herself on thorns, the mysterious longing, morbid and feverish, of a martyr calling for fresh pain.

So she faltered: "Yes, I have no objection. Bring me Madame Honorat."

Then, suddenly, she felt that she could not wait any longer without making sure, quite sure, of this treason; and she asked William in a voice weak as a breath:

"Is it true that M. Bretigny is getting married?"

He replied calmly: "Yes, it is true. We would have told you before this if we could have talked with you."

She continued: "With Charlotte?"

"With Charlotte."

Now William had also a fixed idea himself which from this time forth never left him—his daughter, as yet barely alive, whom every moment he was going to look at. He felt indignant because Christiane's first words were not to ask for the baby; and in a tone of gentle reproach: "Well, look here! you have not yet inquired about the little one. You are aware that she is going on very well?"

She trembled as if he had touched a living wound; but it was necessary for her to pass through all the stations of this Calvary.

"Bring her here," she said.

He vanished to the foot of the bed behind the curtain, then he came back, his face lighted up with pride and happiness, and holding in his hands, in an awkward fashion, a bundle of white linen.

He laid it down on the embroidered pillow close to the head of Christiane, who was choking with emotion, and he said: "Look here, see how lovely she is!"

She looked. He opened with two of his fingers the fine lace with which was hidden from view a little red face, so small, so red, with closed eyes, and mouth constantly moving.

And she thought, as she leaned over this beginning of being: "This is my daughter — Paul's daughter. Here then is what made me suffer so much. This — this — this is my daughter!"

Her repugnance toward the child, whose birth had so fiercely torn her poor heart and her tender woman's body had, all at once, disappeared; she now contemplated it with ardent and sorrowing curiosity, with profound astonishment, the astonishment of a being who sees her firstborn come forth from her.

Andermatt was waiting for her to caress it passionately. He was surprised and shocked, and asked: "Are you not going to kiss it?"

She stooped quite gently toward this little red forehead; and in proportion as she drew her lips closer to it, she felt them drawn, called by it. And when she had placed them upon it, when she touched it, a little moist, a little warm, warm with her own life, it seemed to her that she could not withdraw her lips from that infantile flesh, that she would leave them there forever.

Something grazed her cheek; it was her husband's beard as he bent forward to kiss her. And when he had pressed her a long time against himself with a grateful tenderness, he wanted, in his turn, to kiss his daughter, and with his outstretched mouth he gave it very soft little strokes on the nose.

Christiane, her heart shriveled up by this caress, gazed at both of them there by her side, at her daughter and at him — him!

He soon wanted to carry the infant back to its cradle.

"No," said she, "let me have it a few minutes longer, that I may feel it close to my face. Don't speak to me any more — don't move — leave us alone, and wait."

She passed one of her arms over the body hidden under the swaddling-clothes, put her forehead close to the little grinning face, shut her eyes, and no longer stirred, or thought about anything.

But, at the end of a few minutes, William softly touched her on the shoulder: "Come, my darling, you must be reasonable! No emotions, you know, no emotions!"

Thereupon, he bore away their little daughter, while the mother's eyes followed the child till it had disappeared behind the curtain of the bed.

After that, he came back to her: "Then it is understood that I am to bring Madame Honorat to you to-morrow morning, to keep you company?"

She replied in a firm tone: "Yes, my dear, you may send her to me — to-morrow morning."

And she stretched herself out in the bed, fatigued, worn out, perhaps a little less unhappy.

Her father and her brother came to see her in the evening, and told her news about the locality — the precipitate departure of Professor Cloche in search of his daughter, and the conjectures with reference to the Duchess de Ramas, who was no longer to be seen, and who was also supposed to have started on Mazelli's track. Gontran laughed at these adventures, and drew a comic moral from the occurrences:

"The history of those spas is incredible. They are the only fairylands left upon the earth! In two months more things happen in them than in the rest of the universe during the remainder of the year. One might say with truth that the springs are not mineralized but bewitched. And it is everywhere the same, at Aix, Royat, Vichy, Luchon, and also at the sea-baths, at Dieppe, Étretat, Trouville, Biarritz, Cannes, and Nice. You meet there specimens of all kinds of people, of every social grade—admirable adventures, a mixture of races and people not to be found elsewhere, and marvelous incidents. Women play pranks there with facility and charming promptitude. At Paris one resists temptation—at the waters one falls; there you are! Some men find fortune at them, like Andermatt; others find death, like Aubry-Pasteur; others find worse even than that—and get married there—like myself and Paul. Isn't it queer and funny, this sort of thing? You have heard about Paul's intended marriage—have you not?"

She murmured: "Yes; William told me about it a little while ago."

Gontran went on: "He is right, quite right. She is a peasant's daughter. Well, what of that? She is better than an adventurer's daughter or a daughter who's too short. I knew Paul. He would have ended by marrying a street-walker, provided she resisted him for six months. And to resist him it needed a jade or an innocent. He has lighted on the innocent. So much the better for him!"

Christiane listened, and every word, entering through her ears, went straight to her heart, and inflicted on her pain, horrible pain.

Closing her eyes, she said: "I am very tired. I would like to have a little rest."

They embraced her and went out.

She could not sleep, so wakeful was her mind, active and racked with harrowing thoughts. That idea that he no longer loved her at all became so intolerable that, were it not for the presence of this woman, this nurse nodding asleep in the armchair, she would have got up, opened the window, and flung herself out on the steps of the hotel. A very thin ray of moonlight penetrated through an opening in the curtains, and formed a round bright spot on the floor. She observed it; and in a moment a crowd of memories rushed together into her brain: the lake, the wood, that first "I love you," scarcely heard, so agitating, at Tournoel, and all their caresses, in the evening, beside the shadowy paths, and the road from La Roche Pradière.

Suddenly, she saw this white road, on a night when the heavens were filled with stars, and he, Paul, with his arm round a woman's waist, kissing her at every step they walked. It was Charlotte! He pressed her against him, smiled as he knew how to smile, murmured in her ear sweet words, such as he knew how to utter, then flung himself on his knees and kissed the ground in front of her, just as he had kissed it in front of herself! It was so hard, so hard for her to bear, that turning round and hiding her face in the pillow, she burst out sobbing. She almost shrieked, so much did despair rend her soul. Every beat of her heart, which jumped into her throat, which throbbed in her temples, sent forth from her one word — "Paul — Paul — Paul" — endlessly re-echoed. She stopped up her ears with her hands in order to hear nothing more, plunged her head under the sheets; but then his name sounded in the depths of her bosom with every pant of her tormented heart.

The nurse, waking up, asked of her: "Are you worse, Madame?"

Christiane turned round, her face covered with tears, and murmured: "No, I was asleep — I was dreaming — I was frightened."

Then, she begged of her to light two wax-candles, so that the ray of moonlight might be no longer visible. Toward morning, however, she slumbered.

She had been asleep for a few hours when Andermatt came in, bringing with him Madame Honorat. The fat lady, immediately adopting a familiar tone, questioned her like a doctor; then, satisfied with her answers, said: "Come, come! you're going on very nicely!" Then she took off her hat, her gloves, and her shawl, and, addressing the nurse: "You may go, my girl. You will come when we ring for you."

Christiane, already inflamed with dislike to the woman, said to her husband: "Give me my daughter for a little while."

As on the previous day, William carried the child to her, tenderly embracing it as he did so, and placed it upon the pillow. And, as on the previous day, too, when she felt close to her cheek, through the wrappings, the heat of this little stranger's body, imprisoned in linen, she was suddenly penetrated with a grateful sense of peace.

Then, all at once, the baby began to cry, screaming out in a shrill and piercing voice. "She wants nursing," said Andermatt.

He rang, and the wet-nurse appeared, a big red woman, with a mouth like an ogress, full of large, shining teeth, which almost terrified Christiane. And from the open body of her dress she drew forth a breast, soft and heavy with milk. And when Christiane beheld her daughter drinking, she felt a longing to snatch away and take back the baby, moved by a certain sense of jealousy. Madame Honorat now gave directions to the wet-nurse, who went off, carrying the baby in her arms. Andermatt, in his turn, went out, and the two women were left alone together.

Christiane did not know how to speak of what tortured her soul, trembling lest she might give way to too much emotion, lose her head, burst into tears, and betray herself. But Madame Honorat began to babble of her own accord, without having been asked a single question. When she had related all the scandalous stories that were circulating through the neighborhood, she came to the Oriol family: "They are good people," said she, "very good people. If you had known the mother, what a worthy, brave woman she was! She was worth ten women, Madame. The girls take after her, for that matter."

Then, as she was passing on to another topic, Christiane asked: "Which of the two do you prefer, Louise or Charlotte?"

"Oh! for my own part, Madame, I prefer Louise, your brother's intended wife; she is more sensible, more steady. She is a woman of order. But my husband likes the other better. Men you know, have tastes different from ours."

She ceased speaking. Christiane, whose strength was giving way, faltered: "My brother has often met his betrothed at your house."

"Oh! yes, Madame—I believe really every day. Everything was brought about at my house, everything! As for me, I let them talk, these young people, I understood the thing thoroughly. But what truly gave me pleasure was when I saw that M. Paul was getting smitten by the younger one."

Then, Christiane, in an almost inaudible voice: "Is he deeply in love with her?"

"Ah! Madame, is he in love with her? He had lost his head about her some time since. And then, when the Italian—he who ran off with Doctor Cloche's daughter—kept hanging about the girl a little, it was something worth seeing and watching—I thought they were going to fight! Ah! if you had seen M. Paul's eyes. And he looked upon her as if she were a holy Virgin, nothing less—it's a pleasant thing to see people so much in love as that!"

Thereupon, Christiane asked her about all that had taken place in her presence, about all they had said, about all they had done, about their promenades in the glen of Sans-Souci, where he had so often told her of his love for her. She put unexpected questions, which astonished the fat lady, about matters that nobody would have dreamed of, for she was constantly making comparisons; she recalled a thousand details of what had occurred the year before, all Paul's delicate gallantries, his thoughtfulness about her, his ingenious devices to please her, all that display of charming attentions and tender anxieties which on the part of a man show an imperious desire to win a woman's affections; and she wanted to find out whether he had manifested the same affectionate interest toward the other, whether he had commenced afresh this siege of a soul with the same ardor, with the same enthusiasm, with the same irresistible passion.

And every time she recognized a little circumstance, a little trait, one of those nothings which cause such exquisite bliss, one of those disquieting surprises which cause the heart to beat fast, and of which Paul was so prodigal when he loved, Christiane, as she lay prostrate in the bed, gave utterance to a little "Ah!" expressive of keen suffering.

Amazed at this strange exclamation, Madame Honorat declared more emphatically: "Why, yes. 'Tis as I tell you, exactly as I tell you. I never saw a man so much in love!"

"Has he recited verses to her?"

"I believe so indeed, Madame, and very pretty ones, too!"

And, when they had relapsed into silence, nothing more could be heard save the monotonous and soothing song of the nurse as she rocked the baby to sleep in the adjoining room.

Steps were drawing near in the corridor outside. Doctors Mas-Roussel and Latonne had come to visit their patient. They found her agitated, not quite so well as she had been on the previous day.

When they had left, Andermatt opened the door again, and without coming in: "Doctor Black would like to see you. Will you see him?"

She exclaimed, as she raised herself up in the bed: "No—no—I will not—no!"

William came over to her, looking quite astounded: "But listen to me now—it would only be right—it is his due—you ought to!"

She looked, with her wide-open eyes and quivering lips, as if she had lost her reason. She kept repeating in a piercing voice, so loud that it must have penetrated through the walls: "No!—no!—never!" And then, no longer knowing what she said, and pointing with outstretched arm toward Madame Honorat, who was standing in the center of the apartment:

"I do not want her either!—send her away!—I don't want to see her!—send her away!"

Then he rushed to his wife's side, took her in his arms, and kissed her on the forehead: "My little Christiane, be calm! What is the matter with you?—come now, be calm!"

She had by this time lost the power of raising her voice. The tears gushed from her eyes.

"Send them all away," said she, "and remain alone with me!"

He went across, in a distracted frame of mind, to the doctor's wife, and gently pushing her toward the door: "Leave us for a few minutes, pray. It is the fever—the milk-fever. I will calm her. I will look for you again by and by."

When he came back to the bedside Christiane was lying down, weeping quietly, without moving in any way, quite prostrated.

And then, for the first time in his life, he, too, began to weep.

In fact, the milk-fever had broken out during the night, and delirium supervened. After some hours of extreme excitement, the recently delivered woman suddenly began to speak.

The Marquis and Andermatt, who had resolved to remain near her, and who passed the time playing cards, counting the tricks in hushed tones, imagined that she was calling them, and, rising up, approached the bed. She did not see them; she did not recognize them. Intensely pale, on her white pillow, with her fair tresses hanging loose over her shoulders, she was gazing, with her clear blue eyes, into that unknown, mysterious, and fantastic world, in which dwell the insane.

Her hands, stretched over the bedclothes, stirred now and then, agitated by rapid and involuntary movements, tremblings, and starts.

She did not, at first, appear to be talking to anyone, but to be seeing things and telling what she saw. And the things she said seemed disconnected, incomprehensible. She found a rock too high to jump off. She was afraid of a sprain, and then she was not on intimate terms enough with the man who reached out his arms toward her. Then she spoke about perfumes. She was apparently trying to remember some forgotten phrases. "What can be sweeter? This intoxicates one like wine—wine intoxicates the mind, but perfume intoxicates the imagination. With perfume you taste the very essence, the pure essence of things and of the universe—you taste the flowers—the trees—the grass of the fields—you can even distinguish the soul of the dwellings of olden days which sleeps in the old furniture, the old carpets, and the old curtains." Then her face contracted as if she had undergone a long spell of fatigue. She was ascending a hillside slowly, heavily, and was saying to some one: "Oh! carry me once more, I beg of you. I am going to die here! I can walk no farther. Carry me as you did above the gorges. Do you remember?—how you loved me!"

Then she uttered a cry of anguish—a look of horror came into her eyes. She saw in front of her a dead animal, and she was imploring to have it taken away without giving her pain. The Marquis said in a whisper to his son-in-law: "She is thinking about an ass that we came across on our way back from La Nugère." And now she was addressing this dead beast, consoling it, telling it that she, too, was very unhappy, because she had been abandoned.

Then, on a sudden, she refused to do something required of her. She cried: "Oh! no, not that! Oh! it is you, you who want me to drag this cart!"

Then she panted, as if indeed she were dragging a vehicle along. She wept, moaned, uttered exclamations, and always, during a period of half an hour, she was climbing up this hillside, dragging after her with horrible efforts the ass's cart, beyond a doubt.

And some one was harshly beating her, for she said: "Oh! how you hurt me! At least, don't beat me! I will walk—but don't beat me any more, I entreat you! I'll do whatever you wish, but don't beat me any more!"

Then her anguish gradually abated, and all she did was to go on quietly talking in her incoherent fashion till daybreak. After that, she became drowsy, and ended by going to sleep.

Until the following day, however, her mental powers remained torpid, somewhat wavering, fleeting. She could not immediately find the words she wanted, and fatigued herself terribly in searching for them. But, after a night of rest, she completely regained possession of herself.

Nevertheless, she felt changed, as if this crisis had transformed her soul. She suffered less and thought more. The dreadful occurrences, really so recent, seemed to her to have receded into a past already far off; and she regarded them with a clearness of conception with which her mind had never been illuminated before. This light, which had suddenly dawned on her brain, and which comes to certain beings in certain hours of suffering, showed her life, men, things, the entire earth and all that it contains as she had never seen them before.

Then, more than on the evening when she had felt herself so much alone in the universe in her room, after her return from the lake of Tazenat, she looked upon herself as utterly abandoned in existence. She realized that all human beings walk along side by side in the midst of circumstances without anything ever truly uniting two persons together. She learned from the treason of him in whom she had reposed her entire confidence that the others, all the others, would never again be to her anything but indifferent neighbors in that journey short or long, sad or gay, that followed to-morrows no one could foresee.

She comprehended that even in the clasp of this man's arms, when she believed that she was intermingling with him, entering into him, when she believed that their flesh and their souls had become only one flesh and one soul, they had only drawn a little nearer to one another, so as to bring into contact the impenetrable envelopes in which mysterious nature has isolated and shut up each human creature. And she saw as well that nobody has ever been able, or ever will be able, to break through that invisible barrier which places living beings as far from each other as the stars of heaven. She divined the impotent effort, ceaseless since the first days of the world, the indefatigable effort of men and women to tear off the sheath in which their souls forever imprisoned, forever solitary, are struggling—an effort of arms, of lips, of eyes, of mouths, of trembling, naked flesh, an effort of love, which exhausts itself in kisses, to finish only by giving life to some other forlorn being.

Then an uncontrollable desire to gaze on her daughter took possession of her. She asked for it, and when it was brought to her, she begged to have it stripped, for as yet she only knew its face.

The wet-nurse thereupon unfastened the swaddling-clothes, and discovered the poor little body of the newborn infant agitated by those vague movements which life puts into these rough sketches of humanity. Christiane touched it with a timid, trembling hand, then wanted to kiss the stomach, the back, the legs, the feet, and then she stared at the child full of fantastic thoughts.

Two beings came together, loved one another with rapturous passion; and from their embrace, this being was born. It was he and she intermingled; until the death of this little child, it was he and she, living again both together; it was a little of him, and a little of her, with an unknown something which would make it different from them. It reproduced them both in the form of its body as well as in that of its mind, in its features, its gestures, its eyes, its movements, its tastes, its passions, even in the sound of its voice and its gait in walking, and yet it would be a new being!

They were separated now — he and she — forever! Never again would their eyes blend in one of those outbursts of love which make the human race indestructible. And pressing the child against her heart, she murmured: "Adieu! adieu!" It was to him that she was saying "adieu" in her baby's ear, the brave and sorrowing "adieu" of a woman who would yet have much to suffer, always, it might be, but who would know how to hide her tears.

"Ha! ha!" cried William through the half-open door. "I catch you there! Will you be good enough to give me back my daughter?"

Running toward the bed, he seized the little one in his hands already practiced in the art of handling it, and lifting it over his head, he went on repeating: "Good day, Mademoiselle Andermatt — good day, Mademoiselle Andermatt."

Christiane was thinking: "Here, then, is my husband!"

And she contemplated him, with eyes as astonished as if they were beholding him for the first time. This was he, the man who ought to be, according to human ideas of religion, of society, the other half of her — more than that, her master, the master of her days and of her nights, of her heart and of her body! She felt almost a desire to smile, so strange did this appear to her at the moment, for between her and him no bond could ever exist, none of those bonds alas! so quickly broken, but which seem eternal, ineffably sweet, almost divine.

No remorse even came to her for having deceived him, for having betrayed him. She was surprised at this, and asked herself why it was. Why? No doubt, there was too great a difference between them, they were too far removed from one another, of races too widely dissimilar. He did not understand her at all; she did not understand him at all. And yet he was good, devoted, complaisant.

But only perhaps beings of the same shape, of the same nature, of the same moral essence can feel themselves attached to one another by the sacred bond of voluntary duty.

They dressed the baby again. William sat down.

"Listen, my darling," said he; "I don't venture to announce Doctor Black's visit to you, since you have been so nice toward myself. There is, however, one person whom I would very much like you to see — I mean Doctor Bonnefille."

Then, for the first time, she laughed, with a colorless sort of laugh, which fixed itself on her lips, without going near her heart; and she asked:

"Doctor Bonnefille! what a miracle! So then you are reconciled?"

"Why, yes! Listen! I am going to tell you, as a secret, a great bit of news. I have just bought up the old establishment. I have all the district now. Hey! what a victory. That poor Doctor Bonnefille knew it before anybody, be it understood. So then he has been sly. He came every day to obtain information as to how you were, leaving his card with a word of sympathy written on it. For my part, I responded to these advances with a single visit; and at present we are on excellent terms."

"Let him come," said Christiane, "whenever he likes. I will be glad to see him."

"Good. Thank you. I'll bring him here to you tomorrow morning. I need scarcely tell you that Paul is constantly asking me to convey to you a thousand compliments from him, and he inquires a great deal about the little one. He is very anxious to see her."

In spite of her resolutions she felt a sense of oppression. She was able, however, to say: "You will thank him on my behalf."

Andermatt rejoined: "He was very uneasy to learn whether you had been told about his intended marriage. I informed him that you had; then he asked me several times what you thought about it."

She exerted her strength to the utmost, and felt able to murmur: "You will tell him that I entirely approve of it."

William, with cruel persistency, went on: "He wishes also to know for certain what name you mean to call your daughter. I told him we were hesitating between Marguerite and Genevieve."

"I have changed my mind," said she. "I intend to call her Arlette."

Formerly, in the early days of her pregnancy, she had discussed with Paul the name which they ought to select whether for a son or for a daughter; and for a daughter they had remained undecided between Genevieve and Marguerite. She no longer wanted these two names.

William repeated: "Arlette! Arlette! That's a very nice name—you are right. For my part, I would have liked to call her Christiane, like you. I adore that name—Christiane!"

She sighed deeply: "Oh! it forebodes too much suffering to bear the name of the Crucified."

He reddened, never having dreamed of this comparison, and rising up: "Besides, Arlette is very nice. By-bye, my darling."

As soon as he had left the room, she called the wet-nurse, and directed her for the future to place the cradle beside the bed.

When the little couch in the form of a wherry, always rocking, and carrying its white curtain like a sail on its mast of twisted copper, had been rolled close to the big bed, Christiane stretched out her hand to the sleeping infant, and she said in a very hushed voice: "Go by-bye, my baby! You will never find anyone who will love you as much as I."

She passed the next few days in a state of tranquil melancholy, thinking a great deal, building up within herself a resisting soul, an energetic heart, in order to resume her life again in a few weeks. Her chief occupation now consisted in gazing into the eyes of her child, seeking to surprise in them a first look, but only seeing there two little bluish caverns invariably turned toward the sunlight coming in through the window.

And she experienced a feeling of profound sadness as she reflected that these eyes now closed in sleep would look out on the world, as she herself had looked on it, through the illusion of those secret dreamings which make the souls of young women trustful and joyous. They would love all that she had loved, the beautiful bright days, the flowers, the wood, and alas! living beings too! They would, no doubt, love a man! They would carry in their depths his image, well known, cherished, would see it when he would be far away, would be inflamed on seeing him again. And then—and then they would learn to weep! Tears, horrible tears, would flow over these little cheeks. And the frightful sufferings of love betrayed would render them unrecognizable, those poor wandering eyes which would be blue.

And she wildly embraced the child, saying to it: "Love me alone, my child!"

At length, one day, Professor Mas-Roussel, who came every morning to see her, declared: "You can soon get up for a little, Madame."

Andermatt, when the physician had left, said to his wife: "It is very unfortunate that you are not quite well, for we have a very interesting experiment to-day at the establishment. Doctor Latonne has performed a real miracle with Père Clovis by subjecting him to his system of self-moving gymnastics. Just imagine! This old vagabond is now able to walk as well as anyone. The progress of the cure, moreover, is manifest after each exhibition!"

To please him, she asked: "And are you going to have a public exhibition?"

"Yes, and no. We are having an exhibition before the medical men and a few friends."

"At what hour?"

"Three o'clock."

"Will M. Bretigny be there?"

"Yes, yes. He promised me that he would come to it. From a medical point of view, it is exceedingly curious."

"Well," she said, "as I'll just have risen myself at that time, you will ask M. Bretigny to come and see me. He will keep me company while you are looking at the experiment."

"Yes, my darling."

"You won't forget?"

"No, no. Make your mind easy."

And he went off in search of those who were to witness the exhibition.

After having been imposed upon by the Oriols at the time of the first treatment of the paralytic, he had in his turn imposed upon the credulity of invalids — so easy to get the better of, when it is a question of curing. And now he imposed upon himself with the farce of this cure, talking about it so frequently, with so much ardor and such an air of conviction that it would have been hard to determine whether he believed or disbelieved in it.

About three o'clock, all the persons whom he had induced to attend found themselves gathered together before the door of the establishment, expecting Père Clovis's arrival. He made his appearance, leaning on two walking-sticks, always dragging his legs after him, and bowing politely to everyone as he passed.

The two Oriols followed him, together with the two young girls. Paul and Gontran accompanied their intended wives.

In the great hall where the articulated instruments were fixed, Doctor Latonne was waiting, and killed time by chatting with Andermatt and Doctor Honorat.

When he saw Père Clovis, a smile of delight passed over his clean-shaven lips. He asked: "Well! how are we going on to-day?"

"Oh! all right, all right."

Petrus Martel and Saint Landri presented themselves. They wanted to satisfy their minds. The first believed; the second doubted. Behind them, people saw with astonishment Doctor Bonnefille coming up, saluting his rival, and extending his hand toward Andermatt. Doctor Black was the last to arrive.

"Well, Messieurs and Mesdemoiselles," said Doctor Latonne, as he bowed to Louise and Charlotte Oriol, "you are going to witness a very curious phenomenon. Observe first, before the experiment, this worthy fellow walking a little, but very little. Can you walk without your sticks, Père Clovis?"

"Oh! no, Mochieu!"

"Good, then let us begin."

The old fellow was hoisted on the armchair; his legs were strapped to the movable feet of the sitting-machine; then, at the command of the inspector: "Go quietly!" the attendant, with bare arms, turned the handle.

Thereupon, the right knee of the vagabond was seen rising up, stretching out, bending, then moving forward again; after that, the left knee did the same; and Père Clovis, seized with a sudden delight, began to laugh, while he repeated with his head and his long, white beard all the movements imposed on his legs.

The four physicians and Andermatt, stooping over him, examined him with the gravity of augurs, while Colosse exchanged sly winks with the old chap.

As the door had been left open, other persons kept constantly crowding in, and convinced and anxious bathers pressed forward to behold the experiment.

"Quicker!" said Doctor Latonne; and, in obedience to his command, the man who worked the handle turned it with greater energy. The old fellow's legs began to go at a running pace, and he, seized with irresistible gaiety, like a child being tickled, laughed as loudly as ever he could, moving his head about wildly. And, in the midst of his peals of laughter, he kept repeating: "What a *rigolo!* what a *rigolo!*" having, no doubt, picked up this word from the mouth of some foreigner.

Colosse, in his turn, broke out, and, stamping on the ground with his foot and striking his thighs with his hands, he exclaimed: "Ha! bougrrre of a Cloviche! bougrrre of a Cloviche!"

"Enough!" was the inspector's next command.

The vagabond was unfastened, and the physicians drew apart in order to verify the result.

Then Père Clovis was seen rising from the armchair, stepping on the ground, and walking. He proceeded with short steps, it was true, quite bent, and grimacing from fatigue at every effort, but still he walked!

Doctor Bonnefille was the first to declare: "This is quite a remarkable case!" Doctor Black immediately improved upon his brother-physician. Doctor Honorat, alone, said nothing.

Gontran whispered in Paul's ear: "I don't understand. Look at their heads. Are they dupes or humbugs?"

But Andermatt was speaking. He told the history of this cure since the first day, the relapse, and the final recovery which was declared to be settled and absolute.

He gaily added: "If our patient goes back a little every winter, we'll cure him again every summer."

Then he pompously eulogized the waters of Mont Oriol, extolled their properties, all their properties:

"For my own part," said he; "I have had a proof of their efficacy in the case of a being who is very dear to me; and, if my family is not extinct, it is to Mont Oriol that I will owe it."

But, all at once, he had a flash of recollection. He had promised his wife a visit from Paul Bretigny. He was filled with regret for his forgetfulness, as he was most anxious to gratify her every wish. Accordingly he glanced around him, espied Paul, and coming up to him: "My dear friend, I completely forgot to tell you that Christiane is expecting you at this moment."

Bretigny said falteringly: "Me—at this moment?"

"Yes, she has got up to-day; and she desires to see you before anyone. Hurry then as quickly as possible, and excuse me."

Paul directed his steps toward the hotel, his heart throbbing with emotion. On his way he met the Marquis de Ravenel, who said to him:

"My daughter is up, and is surprised at not having seen you yet."

He halted, however, on the first steps of the staircase in order to consider what he would say to her. How would she receive him? Would she be alone? If she spoke about his marriage, what reply should he make?

Since he had heard of her confinement, he could not think about her without groaning, so uneasy did he feel; and the thought of their first meeting, every time it floated through his mind, made him suddenly redden or grow pale with anguish. He had also thought with deep anxiety of this unknown child, of which he was the father; and he remained harassed by a desire to see it, mingled with a dread of looking at it. He felt himself sunk in one of those moral foulnesses which stain a man's conscience up to the hour of his death. But he feared above all the glance of this woman, for whom his love had been so fierce and so short-lived.

Would she meet him with reproaches, with tears, or with disdain? Would she receive him, only to drive him away?

And what attitude ought he to assume toward her? Humble, crushed, suppliant, or cold? Should he explain himself or should he listen without replying? Ought he to sit down or to remain standing?

And when the child was shown to him, what should he do? What should he say? With what feeling should he appear to be agitated?

Before the door he stopped again, and at the moment when he was on the point of ringing, he noticed that his hand was trembling. However, he placed his finger on the little ivory button, and he heard the sound of the electric bell coming from the interior of the apartment.

A female servant opened the door, and admitted him. And, at the drawing-room door, he saw Christiane, at the end of the second room, lying on her long chair with her eyes fixed upon him.

These two rooms seemed to him interminable as he was passing through them. He felt himself tottering. He was afraid of knocking against the seats, and he did not venture to look down toward his feet in order to avoid lowering his eyes. She did not make a single gesture, or utter a single word. She waited till he was close beside her. Her right hand remained stretched out over her robe and her left leaned over the side of the cradle, covered all round with its curtains.

When he was three paces away from her he stopped, not knowing what best to do. The chambermaid had closed the door after him.

They were alone!

Then, he felt a longing to sink upon his knees, and implore her pardon. But she slowly raised the hand which had rested on her robe, and, extending it slightly toward him, said, "Good day," in a grave tone.

He did not venture to touch her fingers, which, however, he brushed with his lips, while he bowed to her.

She added: "Sit down." And he sat down on a lower chair, close to her feet.

He felt that he ought to speak, but he could not find a word or an idea, and he dared not even look at her. However, he ended by stammering out: "Your husband forgot to let me know that you were waiting for me; but for that, I would have come sooner."

She replied: "Oh! it matters little, since we were bound to see one another again—a little sooner—a little later!"

As she added nothing more, he hastened to say in an inquiring tone: "I hope you are getting on well by this time?"

"Thanks. As well as one can get on, after such shocks!"

She was very pale and thin, but prettier than before her confinement. Her eyes especially had gained a depth of expression which he had never seen in them before. They seemed to have acquired a darker shade, a blue less clear, less transparent, more intense. Her hands were so white that their flesh looked like that of a corpse.

She went on: "Those are hours very hard to live through. But, when one has suffered thus, one feels strong till the end of one's days."

Much affected, he murmured: "Yes; they are terrible experiences!"

She repeated, like an echo: "Terrible."

For some moments there had been light movements in the cradle — the all but imperceptible sounds of an infant awakening from sleep. Bretigny could not longer avert his gaze, preyed upon by a melancholy, morbid yearning which gradually grew stronger, tortured by the desire to behold what lived within there.

Then he observed that the curtains of the tiny bed were fastened from top to bottom with the gold pins which Christiane was accustomed to wear in her corsage. Often had he amused himself in bygone days by taking them out and pinning them again on the shoulders of his beloved, those fine pins with crescent-shaped heads. He understood what she meant; and a poignant emotion seized him, made him feel shriveled up before this barrier of golden spikes which forever separated him from this child.

A little cry, a shrill plaint arose in this white prison. Christiane quickly rocked the wherry, and in a rather abrupt tone:

"I must ask your pardon for allowing you so little time; but I must look after my daughter."

He rose, and once more kissed the hand which she extended toward him; and, as he was on the point of leaving, she said:

"I pray that you may be happy."

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